nce Upon A Time

A modern fairy tale

By Lynn Roberts

Once Upon A Time

To Sherry.

I hope you
enjoy the book

Lynn Roberts
12/11/02

Once Upon A Time

A MODERN FAIRY TALE

Lynn Roberts

Copyright © 2000 by Lynn Roberts.

Library of Congress Number: 00-191467
ISBN #: Softcover 0-7388-2815-7

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

This book was printed in the United States of America.

To order additional copies of this book, contact:
Xlibris Corporation
1-888-7-XLIBRIS
www.Xlibris.com
Orders@Xlibris.com

This book is dedicated to
Lea Tino and John Dexter
for their unwavering faith and support

and, of course,

To

To Dream Lovers Everywhere

Introduction

ONCE Upon a Time, in a magic kingdom by the sea, called California, two people who didn't know each other, yearned for the same thing.

Each of them wanted, with all their hearts, the kind of love they had never before experienced.

The kind of love they both believed existed only in fairy tales.

And, so it happened, that one night a Fairy Godmother sat next to each of them and whispered into their ears.

Would you, she asked them both, want to meet your true soul mate? That one person that for you would be the fairy tale come true? To experience fully the love that the two of you and only the two of you together, could share?

That complete physical, emotional, mental union of perfection?

Would you want to share that love of all loves?

And in their sleep, each of them, apart and still together, answered Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

But wait, the Fairy Godmother cautioned. Before you answer, consider that all Fairy tales have a limit to them. The clock strikes twelve, the white horse turns back into a mouse.

And not every Cinderella leaves a slipper behind for the Prince to find.

Would you, she asked, still want to share all of that love and all of that passion with your one true love even if it were for only one night?

Even if you would never ever see each other again after that night?

Even if you would never really be certain you had ever met them at all outside of a dream?

Both, individually, tossed and turned in their sleep as they considered the true magnitude of that question. They thought about their lives and about the love they each yearned to share with another.

And after much thought and consideration each of them, though still asleep and far apart, said the words that would bring them so much joy and so much pain

Yes, they said at the same time.

Yes yes yes.

And so the Fairy Godmother waved her magic wand . . .

His Story

ON New Years Eve a famous actor attended a party in Beverly Hills.

He wore traditional black tie. He wandered around the room with the other guests. He recognized them of course. In fact, many of them were friends and acquaintances. A puzzled frown wrinkled his brow because for the life of him he couldn't remember why or how he came to be at this party.

He doesn't even like parties.

More particularly, he doesn't like New Years Eve parties. In fact, he distinctly remembered turning down the invitation to this and all other parities he'd been invited to for this night.

Furthermore, he had no memory of changing out of a pair of old jeans and an even older blue sweater into the tuxedo he found himself wearing. Or of driving into Beverly Hills from his beach house in Malibu.

Yet here he was.

He wanted to leave. To escape.

And then. . . .

And then he gazed across the room and saw a woman wearing an emerald green satin dress. *And he knew in that instant that if he lived to be a thousand he would never forget the way she looked on this night.*

Her hair was pale blond, it's silky tresses fell in soft waves past her shoulders. The dress had a square neck and long sleeves. The waist was fitted and the full skirt flounced to the floor. And when she briefly turned, he saw the dress was backless to the waist except for the delicate laces that criss crossed her back

Her eyes were a lighter green than the dress, her lashes long and thick. Her lipstick was a pale rose that matched the polish on her long nails perfectly.

The woman in the green dress smiled shyly at him and suddenly he knew.

He was at this party to meet her.

He doesn't know who she is or how he knew she would be at this party on this night, but he does know, as he has never known anything before in his life that he is at this party to meet her.

They walked across the room toward each other, drawn by an invisible magnet.

Without a word he took her in his arms and they began to dance.

After, he couldn't remember what they talked about, or if they spoke at all. He could remember only that never before had he been so at ease, so complete as he was that evening with her in his arms.

* * *

The music stopped temporarily. They accepted champagne from a passing waiter and silently toasted each other.

He had never felt this way before.

Not ever.

She smiled at him again and he suddenly knew how Prince Charming had felt in the company of Cinderella.

No one else in the room existed for him.

Only her.

The band returned and the singer sang an old blues song he hadn't heard in years.

The lyric spoke of love and cautioned that love could vanish in a moment if you didn't hold on to it now.

The music seemed to be sending them both a message.

He took the champagne from her hand and set it aside. She moved into his arms so naturally it was as if they had always been together.

He could feel his heart beating—or was he feeling hers?

The song ended with the advise to take love now before it could disappear with the morning light.

It was the perfect cue for a kiss.

Their lips neared.

And

A hand slapped him heavily on the shoulder and broke the magic spell he was under.

He turned to greet the director of his last film and they exchanged pleasantries. The director was eager to talk about the movie. Not only was it a financial success, but the reviews had been favorable too. The director quoted one of the best reviews to his star.

He nodded politely and smiled, waiting for the director to pause long enough for him to make the introductions. The opportunity finally presented itself and he turned to share the moment with her only to discover she was gone!

He looked around the room with a sense of loss that amazed him.

He glanced at his watch. It was only 11:00.

Too early for even a Cinderella to disappear.

The director, realizing he had lost his star's attention moved off to another, more receptive audience.

Time passed.

* * *

He wandered the room in search of her, talked to the other party goers, thanked his host for inviting him, explained to several friends that he'd changed his mind about staying at home and accepted more congratulations on the new film. Under other circumstances he might have been enjoying himself.

But where was she?

* * *

And then suddenly they were in each others arms again, dancing.

How did she get back into his arms?

He didn't know.

He didn't care.

He didn't care at all.

All he cared about was the feel of her in his arms.

* * *

They fit together with perfection.

He didn't lead; she didn't follow.

They were one thought, one action.

* * *

As midnight neared he anticipated the loss he would experience when she was gone.

He knew he couldn't let her go so soon.

He couldn't ever let her go.

The unbidden thought startled him.

Woah.

He was suddenly in previously uncharted territory and he wasn't certain how to get to the next level.

What to say—how to say the words that would convince her to stay.

How ironic. He made a very good living playing the great lover. And here he felt like a teenager—all elbows and knees. Afraid of looking in the mirror and discovering spinach stuck in his teeth or an unexpected attack of acne.

Wondering what to do next.

His mind formed the words his mouth didn't know how to say.

Come home with me. Stay with me.
Don't leave me now

Would she understand the meaning behind the words?

* * *

As it happened, he didn't remember how leaving came about.

Midnight came, people sang, balloons fell from the ceiling, confetti was tossed, toasts were made; everyone kissed everyone else.

He was kissed by the hostess; *she* was kissed by a well known television star and he surprised himself when he experienced a sudden burst of jealousy during that brief kiss .

And then . . .

They kissed.

He would remember that moment forever.

Yes, there had been that earlier small touch of lips on the terrace. A momentous occasion, though brief.

But this midnight kiss . . .

It spoke of magic.

Of moonlit nights,

Of love.

Of passion.

Of promises unspoken . . .

* * *

And then they were outside, holding hands.

At first she insisted on following him in her car. She drove a red 280ZX. He drove a black Porsche. He told her they could leave her car there and come back for it but she said no and he didn't want to risk her changing her mind about coming with him so he agreed.

And then just as suddenly she changed her mind again and slid into his car beside him.

They held hands on the drive to his house in Malibu.

It was a night that would haunt him forever.

* * *

They made love.

They were love.

Never before had he experienced such feelings.

He felt he was spending this night inside a fairy tale.

* * *

Her skin was softer than imaginable.
Her laughter came from deep in her throat.

They were made for each other and he thanked whatever Gods existed for bringing her into his life.

They made love and spoke in soft voices all through the night.

In the early dawn she poured fresh orange juice and layered cream cheese on toasted onion bagels.

They walked the beach for miles, unmindful of the cold, and then ran back to his place and the rumpled bed, laughing like children.

It was late morning before they slept.

* * *

When he woke she was gone.

Unlike Cinderella she left no clue of her existence.

No piece of pumpkin.

No white mouse.

No glass slipper;

In desperation, already knowing the answer, he called his hosts of the night before only to learn her car was gone.

No one had seen her drive off

But her car was gone.

And just like that . . .

She ceased to exist.

Except for his dreams.

She returned often in his dreams and he would wake, certain he would find her lying next to him.

But she never was and the next year of his life became a living hell.

* * *

He went from party to party, always searching.

Sometimes he came close.

The right hair, the wrong color eyes.

The right color eyes, the wrong shaped lips.

In some ways her face was an indelible print in his mind, in others she was a vague shadow, unable to be clearly defined.

She was everywhere
yet she was nowhere.

He tried to recreate her in every face; every walk.

She haunted his life;
colored his days and nights.

* * *

He lost weight.

He took up; then gave up smoking . . .

His acting improved. The critics said he had opened up the door to his hidden emotions.

He wanted to laugh,
he *felt like crying.*

And always he searched.

* * *

He became angry.

Granted he didn't know who she was but he didn't kid himself that she didn't know exactly who he was.

After all, his likeness and name were on major billboards across the country. His films were shown on television almost daily. He was featured on every Map of the Stars.

Unlike her, he wasn't invisible.

* * *

He raged!

He shouted to the heavens and said he hoped he NEVER saw her again!

He forgave her nothing!

He forgave her everything!

If only she would come back to him!

* * *

Sometimes he thought he would go mad.

Finally, when he could take no more, he managed to convince himself it had all been a dream and at last he began to recover.

* * *

And then someone else who had been at that same New Years Eve party asked him about her and the sleepless nights, the half real dreams, the eternal searching began all over again.

Where was she?

Why had she left him?

* * *

How could they have shared what they shared that long wondrous night unless she felt as he did.

He couldn't find her; but surely she could find him.

Why didn't she?

* * *

He walked the beach in search of answers and found none.

He couldn't confide in friends; they wouldn't understand.

In his lifetime he had never felt with such intensity; never yearned so completely.

Never felt so lost and alone.

Her Story

WHAT she knew about that night
all she would probably ever really know was that

One minute she was standing at the sink, loading the dishwasher and thinking about how very odd it felt to be alone on this one night of the year.

Dressed in black torn sweat pants and a red T-shirt instead of her new black dress. Tennis shoes instead of her silver pumps, a smudge of dirt on her face instead of makeup, chipped red nail polish instead of the French manicure she had intended to have.

She shook her head in amusement.

It went against everything society taught you. Only losers spent New Years Eve and Saturday nights home alone.

And yet, here she was, home alone, on a New Years Eve that *was* a Saturday night.

She dried her hands, poured a glass of champagne and raised the glass in toast to herself.

New Years Eve alone was sure going to beat last years horror of trying to act as though everything were fine when the marriage had already fallen irrevocably apart.

So, this year she had turned down the party invitations from well meaning friends who wanted to fix her up even before the divorce became final.

She'd see the New Years in alone, thank you very much.

* * *

It seemed to her in retrospect that she took a sip of champagne, the doorbell rang and the next thing she knew she was driving her red 280 ZX up the circular drive of an incredible Beverly Hills mansion.

Valet parking attendants wearing black tuxedo pants, white shirts/black ties and white jackets for the occasion took her keys and drove off with her car.

And then she was at the front door.

Her sweats had been exchanged for a beautiful green satin dress, her tennis shoes were now satin heels, dyed to match the dress perfectly. And in her hand she held an engraved invitation that bore her name in raised script on polished linen.

Tonight was a fairy tale come true
and she was Cinderella.

* * *

Once inside the elegant home of one of America's most famous couples, she wondered again what on earth she was doing in a house full of people she didn't know but certainly recognized. That famous movie star over there and the beautiful model/future movie star across the room. That famous television star talking to that ball player, and on and on and on

She handed the green satin coat to a waiting butler and crossed the room in a dream state. She accepted a tall fluted glass of champagne from a passing waiter.

Perhaps she should leave now before her hosts realized their mistake in inviting her . . .

It was at that moment she felt someone looking at her and turned slowly.

* * *

Of course she recognized one of America's most famous leading men. He was smiling at her and she amazed herself by smiling shyly back at him.

And then she was walking toward him and then she was in his arms and they were gliding across the dance floor . . .

and she suddenly knew:

She was at this party to meet him.

* * *

It was absolutely amazing.

She, who had never been able to dance close with any man, not even her husband, found herself one half of two people in one body, moving in rhythm to the music; one thought, one mind.

They didn't speak.

They didn't have to.

He held her close, her head rested on his chest, his breath softly fluttered her hair.

She looked up at him; her hair caressed his lips.

* * *

She thought he kissed her temple and maybe he did, but probably not.

For a moment, they gazed into each other's souls and then she laid her head against his chest again and they danced across the room to the door leading to the gardens.

* * *

Arm in arm they strolled.

She wanted him to kiss her but she was afraid if he did, the spell would be broken and she would find herself back in her apartment, listening to the hum of the dishwasher.

Her eyes closed as she imagined his mouth on hers.

And then suddenly it was!

That brief kiss took her breath away.

She wanted to cry for the beauty of it.

She wanted to laugh for the sheer joy of it.

* * *

And then they were inside again surrounded once more by a room full of people.

When the world-famous director interrupted them she decided to take the opportunity and leave before she was exposed as a party crasher.

Before this magic evening could be spoiled in any way.

Besides, Cinderella always left before the end of the party.

Didn't she?

He didn't notice when she moved quietly away from his side.

She wandered around the room.

A famous Oscar winning actress smiled warmly at her and welcomed her to the party.

She walked toward the door. She even remembered retrieving her coat. . . .

* * *

And then suddenly they were in each other arms again, dancing.

The questions were all there in her mind.

How? Why? What? . . .

And then his arms enfolded her and she had never felt so safe and yet so on fire and all questions faded from her consciousness.

* * *

He kissed her for the second time after the crowd counted down to the New Year.

He took her breath away.

She didn't want this night to end.

She felt his lips touch her ear.

His breath was warm against her neck as he whispered,

I don't want this night to end.
Please, Cinderella, come home with me.

He kissed her again.

She reminded herself that it was midnight and that certainly she, like the real Cinderella would soon turn back into a pumpkin.

She should run for the door and get far away from the palace before her finery was gone, returned to a pair of tattered sweat pants and faded T-shirt.

She couldn't go with him. She couldn't!

Yet, how could she say no to something she wanted so badly.

* * *

She decided to drive her own car but at the last minute she knew that if she drove her car she would never go with him and she wanted to go with him more than she had ever wanted anything in her entire life, so she agreed to leave her car behind.

He held her hand on the drive as though he were afraid she would jump out of the car and disappear.

Maybe she would have, she wasn't sure.

She held his hand as tight as he held hers.

* * *

She didn't know what she expected to happen once they arrived at his house in Malibu.

She only knew she could never have written a love scene as sensual, as romantic, as complete as the one they shared.

He swept her up in his arms and kissed her as he carried her through the house and into his bedroom.

He stilled her fears and apprehensions with his kisses, with his slow and seductive touch, with the words he murmured.

And she gave herself to him with total trust and abandon.

He whispered words of love in her ear, breathed them into her mouth, traced them on her body with his fingertips.

He made love to her hair, to the inside of her elbow, to the spot behind her knee . . .

And she loved him in return.

Completely, selfishly, selflessly, with no thought beyond the immediate.

They didn't just make love, they were themselves an expression of love.

This moment might end; this love never would.

* * *

Later they lay in each other's arms, sated yet each still needing the feel of the other pressed tight against them.

It was as though their two bodies wanted to fuse into one.

She told him about the movie she wanted to write;

He told her about his upcoming film.

They were the only words spoken of something beyond the now.

He made her laugh.

The sound seemed foreign to her after so many months of nothing to laugh about.

When he caressed her breast she purred, a low growl in her throat. He loved it, delighted in it. So he touched her there again and she purred again and again.

* * *

In the hour just before dawn they drank orange juice and ate toasted bagels with cream cheese for energy and then she put on a pair of his sweats rolled them up, and added a pair of heavy wool socks. He couldn't stop laughing at the look of her bundled in his clothes'

He grabbed a jacket and they walked the beach, legs in synch, arms wrapped around each other—lovers to anyone who might see.

He told her marvelous stories about himself and never noticed until too late that she told him nothing about herself, not even her first name.

He called her his own Cinderella.

They raced each other back to the house and the messed up bed, reaching the house in a tie, each eager to feel their body against the other.

* * *

She burned with the need to feel his lips on her skin; to feel him inside her.

She couldn't wait to see him naked again, touch him, kiss the hair on his chest, move sinuously over him, teasing him, fulfilling him . . .

He lifted her up onto the kitchen table and they tossed their clothes aside, laughing—two children in innocent surrender.

After, he opened a bottle of champagne and added it to the orange juice and they carried their glasses into the bedroom.

* * *

Did they both somehow know they had to squeeze a lifetime of loving into one night?

They fell asleep in each other's arms.

* * *

She didn't remember leaving; she had no idea how she had picked up her car.

She only knew that one minute she was lying next to the man she would forever love and the next she was standing under her own shower; her tears blending with the cascading water.

* * *

Never had she been so happy.

Never had she been so miserable and alone.

* * *

As time passed she came more and more to accept that night as a beautiful dream.

Sometimes she was tempted to find a way to see him; to see if he would remember her—to see if somehow the love she felt would communicate itself to him.

She couldn't do it of course.

What if he didn't remember her? What if he didn't feel the way she felt?

She would die!

* * *

At first she avoided his films because to see him in someone else's arms caused her pain unimaginable.

And then she bought every video of every film he had ever made—even the bad ones—and watched them all, over and over.

By the end of the first year she accepted that he was gone.

a *wonderful memory of a magical dream.*

She put the videos away and tried to get on with her life.

She worked on her script. She took temp jobs to pay the rent. She went to the movies with friends.

And every day she looked for him; listened for the sound of his voice.

If it was only a dream; if she hadn't really gone to a party in Beverly Hills, if she didn't own a green dress, then why was there suddenly a green satin dress in her closet that New Years day?

Sometimes she would stand in front of the closet and stare at it. She didn't know where it had come from. She didn't remember putting it on that night. and moreover,

It was a size too small.

There were days she would take the dress out and hold it up in front of herself. She would look into the mirror, stare into the green eyes reflected there, touch her short blond hair smooth the dress and tears would glide down her face.

Why had she run away?

She asked herself that question over and over.

Because it was a dream silly, she would tell herself, the dream ends and you wake up.

But she didn't accept that for an answer.

Even if it was a dream, why leave? Why not stay until you couldn't stay any longer?

She knew the real truth.

And the truth was, she was afraid.

Never before had she ever felt so deeply, with such intensity, with so much love. And it scared her.

Frightened her beyond reason.

What if she had stayed. What if it wasn't a dream after all.

And what if he didn't feel the way she did. . . .

What if for him it had just been an incredible Fantastic night?

What if that was all it was for him?

For her, *This,* she knew, was the

REAL THING
in capital letters, ten feet tall.

* * *

It was easier getting over her failed marriage than it was getting over this dream.

To meet your perfect love.

To spend one magical night with him.

And then never see him again.

What kind of misbegotten fairy tale was this?

* * *

She tried to forget him. To excise him from her memories.

But she couldn't bear to think of a life without him in it at all so she looked for him at night.

After she'd fallen asleep.

He came to her sometimes in her dreams. He always looked so sad and she could hear him call out for her.

He asked her where she was.

He begged her to come back to him.

In dreams she found herself standing in his bedroom, watching him sleep.

Once she even laid down on the bed next to him and he woke and took her in his arms.

* * *

Of course it was all an illusion.

She knew that.

But wasn't life an illusion anyway?

She didn't know anymore.

She only knew she was in love with a man who existed in her life only after she was asleep.

* * *

She cried a lot.
She learned to laugh more.

She lost weight, gained it back, lost it again until the green dress fit. She let her hair grow till it looked as it had on New Years Eve and then cut it off once more.

Her husband begged her for another chance and she tried, she really tried, but in the end she filed for divorce.

* * *

The year passed not quickly but it did pass. She managed to get a couple of her projects optioned but nothing came of it. She got a job; wrote a script for enough money to quit the job.

* * *

She was getting better. She was getting over him . . .

And then

One day, she saw him walking down San Vicente Boulevard in Brentwood, with a beautiful starlet.

The starlet's name was Claudia and all the gossip mongers said they were the perfect couple and they were going to get married.

She wanted to hate her, but actually Claudia seemed like a nice person; probably just the kind of woman he deserved to have in his life.

* * *

It happened on a Saturday.

She stood outside a book store in Brentwood and watched as they strolled down the street together, hand in hand.

And then suddenly,

He stopped talking to Claudia and looked around as though somehow he knew she was there.

She quickly hid behind a pillar. Her heart was racing.

He couldn't know who she was.

He didn't even know about the dreams.

Did he?

His Story

HE met Claudia on a publicity jaunt.

She'd had a small role in his film and the studio thought the press would like seeing the two of them together while they were promoting the film around the country.

The studio was right. The press loved it.

Ironically, they'd discovered they genuinely enjoyed each other's company so they continued to see each other.

It wasn't a serious involvement.

He didn't want to see anyone seriously.- His heart already belonged to someone.

On the other hand, who was he saving himself for?

Someone who no longer existed?

Someone who—maybe,—and oh how he hated to even think this . . .

Someone who maybe hadn't *ever* existed?

He liked Claudia well enough and there was a time when he told himself he could learn to maybe love her and put aside the past.

That is

Until the day he and Claudia were walking down the street, and suddenly.

She was there.

Somewhere.

Watching.

He felt her presence as surely as if she had called out his name.

He stopped and turned. He searched the crowded sidewalks for her face; his heart the radar.

She was here. He knew it.

And she saw him too.

He could feel it in his heart.

In his soul.

Where was she. Why didn't she come to him?

The magnetic force between them pulled him from Claudia's side, across the street, through the shoppers, toward the book store.

A broken heart seeking its other half.

Nothing else existed for him.

Not the adoring fans. Not the traffic cop shouting at him to get back on the curb. Not the car that almost hit him as he crossed the street against the light.

Not Claudia, chasing after him.

She was here.

Somewhere.

And nothing else mattered.

Soon, soon he would confront her and then he could ask the questions that had haunted him all these months.

Why? Why did you leave me?

Why didn't you come back to me?

Did he really want to know?

He *had* to know!

He stepped just inside the door of the bookstore.

He looked around, a slightly bewildered expression on his handsome face.

She was gone.

He couldn't feel her anymore . . .

"NO!"

How could she not be there?

He wanted to smash his fist through the glass window.

Claudia ran up to him, puzzled.

Was anything wrong; could she help?

He shook his head.

No one could help him now.

She was gone!

The words whirled round and round in his head.

They filled his heart with despair.

She was gone.

Again.

* * *

Back on the street he spun around angrily, searching the crowd, trying to reconnect with her.

Heart to heart.

Soul to soul.

Nothing.

Nothing!

But she had been there dammit! He had *felt* her presence.

She was here!!

He wasn't even aware that he was shouting the words out loud.

Where is she?! He demanded of the unknowing crowd.

Where did she go?

Thinking there must have been a robbery attempt or something else illegal to have upset the man famous for not ever losing his cool, the police officer stepped forward.

Could he help, should he call someone?. . . .

No! No no. He shook his head. No one could help.

Only her.

And she was gone.

Claudia led him away, holding him, her arm wrapped through his. He went with her his eyes still searching.

Ever searching.

Her Story

SHE ran out the back door of the book store, across the parking lot and into her car. She laid across the seat, her heart pounding, her temples throbbing.

He almost saw her;—almost . . .

But he was only a dream . . . wasn't he?

Wasn't he?

Of course he wasn't really looking for her.

How could he be.

Could he be?

What if.

What if he had been looking for her.

What if she had let him see her.
What harm would there have been in that. . . . ?

* * *

And just what did she think would've happen if he'd seen her.

Did she honestly believe he would have dropped Claudia's hand and declared his undying love for her?

She'd be a stranger to him.

And

She couldn't bear the thought of his looking right past her, not knowing who she was.

Or worse, thinking she was just another of his adoring fans.

She could envision him signing his name on a scrap of paper and handing it to her . . .

Smiling politely, asking her name so he could make it personal . . .

It would destroy her.

Tears rained down her face. She brushed them away blindly.

Oh God this hurt so bad!

She turned the key in the ignition. The red Z started with a roar and she drove away,

never knowing that in front of the store he heard her drive away and something inside him died.

His Story

HE didn't want to be alone.

He couldn't bear the thought of being alone that night after being so close and yet not finding her.

He didn't want to lie in the big bed surrounded by memories of another night so long ago.

He couldn't handle waking from a dreamless sleep. Or worse, waking from a dream of her to once again discover he was all alone.

Tonight he knew he could not stand that.

So when Claudia offered to stay with him he agreed.

* * *

They didn't make love.

He wondered if he would ever want to make love with anyone again.

Instead

He held Claudia in his arms and together they listened to the surf gently lapping against the sand while they fell asleep.

He woke in the middle of the night and reached out for *her.* He found Claudia instead.

* * *

Claudia was confident that night would alter their relationship and turn it in a new direction.

She was right.

And she was wrong.

Her Story

SHE spent most of the night pacing; then she raced up Pacific Coast Highway—almost as far as his house, before she turned back.

She met a friend and talked for hours about nothing.

She drank too much coffee. She even smoked a cigarette, which alarmed her friend—and her too.

She drove home and tried to watch one of his movies.

He kissed the leading lady, a sexy and beautiful star, and she switched to someone else's movie.

It was almost dawn when she drove back to Malibu

* * *

In the early morning light she walked the beach in front of his house, not really noticing where she was.

She found an outcropping of large rocks and sat, legs drawn up against her chest, chin resting on her knees.

What should she do?

It obviously wasn't over for her.

In her heart she knew it would *never* be over for her.

* * *

Her arms wrapped around her legs and hugged them closer. She longed to feel his arms around her,

Holding her.

To feel his mouth on hers, kissing her, assuring her everything would be all right.

If she concentrated she could almost. . . .

She dried her eyes and forced a bitter laugh.

And now for the one hundred dollar question . . .

What if Cinderella ran away from the ball, dropping her glass slipper and no one noticed.

Or cared.

Oh, hell, what if the prince stepped on the slipper accidentally and smashed it all to smithereens while he danced with the Princess Claudia.

What if it was all just a dumb fairy tale without the happy ending.

* * *

Her hand drifted in the water. Foam from the spray shone in her hair.

The sky lightened with the pink gray of dawn.

Slowly she became more aware of her surroundings.

She walked the quiet beach. Lost in memories of another dawn morning on another beach much like this one.

She tossed a stone into the nearly flat surf. It skimmed three times before it sank. She walked on, singing to herself.

La da da de dah . . .

His Story

CLAUDIA poured fresh coffee into an oversize coffee mug and took it into the bathroom. He was singing in the shower.

Claudia handed the coffee into the shower and he stopped singing long enough to thank her and take a long drink; then he handed the cup back to her, poured shampoo in his hands and began washing his hair singing.

Well, he certainly seemed happy enough this morning in spite of a restless night. Claudia left his coffee on the counter and went back to the kitchen to start breakfast.

* * *

In the shower, he continued his song
a*nd* then

And then he heard her singing with him, her voice a perfect blend with his.

Logic told him it was Claudia he heard singing.

His heart told him it was her.

He forgot about the soap in his hair. He turned off the water and continued singing. He could still hear the harmony of her voice.

He wrapped a towel around his waist and ran out of the bathroom.

In the hall he stubbed his toe on a loose tile and stopped long enough to swear and hold his foot while he hopped around in pain.

Her Story

SHE should leave. She had places to go; things to do.

She walked past a gray wind-weathered beach house never knowing it was his.

She envisioned herself fixing his breakfast; slicing oranges, toasting bagels . . .

She gave herself over to the day dream/memory as she walked toward the sandy, ice plant covered hill next to his house.

She visualized the scene. The haze of early morning. The smell of the toasted bagels . . . The taste of the orange juice.

She took a deep breath and inhaled the scents and sounds of the past.

His Story

HE stopped swearing and looked past Claudia. His eyes widened.

He saw *her*. He stared. He couldn't believe his eyes.

She was standing at the kitchen counter, slicing oranges.

He shook his head to erase the image.

It remained.

He shook it again. Harder.

She poured orange juice into tall champagne glasses and arranged the bagels, glasses and orange slices on a tray.

She smiled at him. . . . picked up the tray and walked toward him.

He was about to put his arms around her when she walked right past him toward the bathroom.

He ignored Claudia's

"*What are you doing?*"
and followed *her* down the hall to the bathroom.

Her Story

HER car was parked on the road above.

She continued singing.

In her imagination she heard him singing along with her.

Of course in her imagination he did much more than just sing.

She envisioned him in a shower, singing to himself while she started breakfast in the kitchen.

She joined him in the shower.

She could feel the water on her naked body; feel his arms around her.

She stopped walking and leaned against the house, giving herself over completely to the *'dream'*.

His Story

HE hesitated at the bathroom door.

He must be losing his mind because he could hear himself in the bathroom shower singing and *she* was there with him—

. . . laughing and singing.

He took a deep breath. He closed his eyes and focused.

He opened the bathroom door and stepped inside quickly.

The pebbled glass shower door was closed. The glass shower stall was fogged over with steam.

But the two naked figures inside the shower were still visible - and they looked very familiar.

He heard a voice singing outside his bathroom window.

He was afraid to turn away from the shower lest the figures inside vanish.

But the voice at the window beckoned him.

The female voice **outside** the window sounded exactly like voice **inside** the shower.

It couldn't be.

He continued watching the shower as he backed up to the window.

He dared a fleeting look out the window and up to the road just in time to see the red Z drive away.

The singing in the shower stopped.

The bathroom was empty except for him.

Reality crashed around him!

He didn't know whether he should yell
or smash everything in sight.

He did a little of both.

* * *

Claudia heard the glass breaking from the living room and decided it might be best if she left him alone.

She was beginning to care a lot about this man. She knew she wanted to help him. He seemed to be in such pain . . .

Her Story

SHE drove back to the highway and turned left, away from the City. Sobs wracked her body and tears poured from her eyes with such force that she turned on her windshield wipers in an effort to see.

She had actually felt him touch her! Felt his kiss!

Dammit, she even heard his voice!!

She must be going mad.

She couldn't keep this up.

She just couldn't.

She had to get on with her life.

A *real* life.

A life based on real things and real people and real kisses and . . . real.

* * *

She sped up the Coast Highway, violating every speed limit, trying to out run her feelings. She only slowed down when she arrived at the outskirts of Oxnard. She found a McDonalds on the other side of town and got a large diet coke with lots of ice.

Then, she turned back toward Los Angeles toward Malibu, toward the man who haunted her days and filled her nights with longing.

At Zuma Beach she parked her car and sat staring at the ocean with eyes blinded by tears.

A surfer tapped on the window of her car. *Was she okay? Was she sick? Could he help?*

She managed a weak smile and explained she was just suffering from the usual broken heart syndrome.

The surfer nodded his understanding. *Time, he said. It takes a lot of time.*

That sage advice stopped her tears and she walked down to the edge of the surf, and watched the surfer swim out to sea, towing his surf board behind him.

As a matter of courtesy for his kindness, she watched while he waited patiently for a good wave. Finally he caught one and rode it almost to shore before sliding off the board and turning to head out to sea once more.

They waved to each other and then she turned to leave.

She was suddenly ravenous!

Back in her car, she searched for her purse, found it, scrounged around inside and located a small package of oreos. She opened the pack and grabbed two of the cookies.

She turned the cookie in her hand, examining it for flaws. Then she took a bite. Excellent. Unlike others she did not separate the cookie and eat the icing first. No, no. It was the taste of the filling with the chocolate shell that appealed to her.

She ate another cookie and drank the last of the diet coke

In less than three hours she had an important meeting with a producer in Santa Monica. What would he say if he saw her now?

He'd probably think she was crazy.

Heck, she was crazy. How else could she explain what was happening to her.

On the other hand, did she care what some producer thought of her mental state?

No.

What she cared about.

All that she cared about,
was living in a beach house in Malibu.

What she cared about . . .

All that she cared about—except for her writing—was probably enjoying his life with a beautiful starlet without so much as ever a thought of her.

She sighed.

If she could only believe that he shared her dreams.

That he had at least shared that first one, maybe it wouldn't be so hard.

As was . . . She couldn't see him except in a dream.
and

He didn't even know who she was; and didn't have a clue about the dreams.

Another sigh.

The alarm on her watch buzzed, reminding her that she had a meeting to go to.

A *real* meeting, she chided herself.

She barely missed a speeding ticket on the way home.

* * *

At home

She grabbed a quick shower, brushed her hair and put on minimal make up.

In her imagination he sat in her living room and smiled at her.

Good-luck he said.
Hurry home he told her.

And then she was out the door to her meeting.

His Story

IT took awhile for him to clean up the mess in the bathroom.

He was too embarrassed to leave it for the maid and it wouldn't have been fair to take Claudia up on her offer to clean it for him.

Especially since the mess had sort of come from another woman.

It was the same woman wasn't it?

Her hair was shorter then he remembered; but people do cut their hair,

The eyes were still green and that little spot on her shoulder was still there.

Weird how he could put himself there in the shower with her, see her so well, smell her perfume, know the touch of her skin . . .

He brushed up the last of the broken glass and dumped it in the trash can. How on earth would he explain this to Claudia.

He couldn't.

He didn't try.

She didn't ask.

* * *

He had a sudden craving for an oreo.

Claudia found him in the kitchen eating oreos and drinking coffee. She poured herself a cup of coffee and helped herself to one of the cookies. She absentmindedly opened the cookie and started to eat the icing.

He stared at her in mock horror and took the cookie away from her. He carefully replaced the two parts and explained the special blend of flavors when you ate the cookies in one piece.

At his insistence Claudia tried it his way, then made a face and separated the cookie again and licked off the icing. He shook his head, called her a Philistine and then smiled and bit off half his cookie and ate it.

Claudia smiled at him. He half smiled back but it was almost as though he didn't know she was there. She reached over and brushed a lock of hair off his forehead.

He looked at her.

Claudia decided his mouth was extremely kissable.

While she was staring at his mouth, as though he'd read her mind, he leaned forward and kissed her. A surprised moment later Claudia was kissing him back.

It was a very strange kiss because she felt he wasn't really kissing her at all. It was more like he was kissing someone else through her.

When the kiss ended, he searched her face as though he was looking for another face in hers. He shook his head from side to side and laughed and ate another cookie.

He told Claudia he was glad she was there. He said he'd been going through some tough times right now—nothing he could really talk about. He said if it was okay with her, he had some things to do and he'd like to put her in a cab for home.

She tried not to show her disappointment, put on a false smile and gathered up her things.

No problem.

She was a no problem girl.

And she didn't like it.

Not one little bit.

* * *

During the cab ride home, Claudia thought about everything that had happened, starting with his surprising actions at the book store.

And what was this thing going on between him and the woman she'd glimpsed slicing bagels in the kitchen.

At first she'd thought the woman was real; the maid or something. She even spoke to her.

But when the woman had said nothing and continued arranging the bagel slices neatly on a plate, pouring orange juice into champagne glasses, Claudia decided she must be seeing a ghost.

It was about then that he'd banged his toe and jumped around the floor swearing, his hair white with shampoo, the towel dangerously low on his hips.

He looked so funny.

And sexy too.

And then he'd suddenly stopped everything and stared past Claudia at that woman.

There was no mistaking it. He saw her too.

The woman brushed by Claudia and walked over to him.

She'd looked him square in the eye, leaned forward like she was going to kiss him and then walked right by him.

He turned around and followed her down the hall. Claudia quickly fell in behind them.

At the bathroom door, the woman seemed to vanish. Before he opened the bathroom door, Claudia could hear

singing. Two voices. His voice she recognized from earlier. The other voice belonged to a woman.

When he opened the door and walked into the bathroom, she would have walked in right behind him. She was eager to put faces to the mysterious voices. But before she could follow he closed the door and she was left alone in the hall.

The singing continued for only a few moments. And at one point, Claudia, her ear pressed to the door, thought she heard another woman's voice. No, not another woman. The same woman or someone with an identical voice.

And then everything had become very silent. She waited. Put her hand on the door and was about to open it when she heard him shout.

NO! with such force and desperation that she waited for a moment and then quickly retraced her steps to the kitchen.

She sat in the kitchen and drank coffee while she listened to him shouting in the bathroom and then begin smashing things.

Claudia didn't have any idea what she had just witnessed. Instinctively, though, she knew it would not be wise for her to let him know she had seen this mysterious woman.

Her heart ached for him. He was such a good person.

If he was having delusions, he needed a friend.

If he heard and saw what she did he needed a friend.

Claudia was determined to be that friend . . .

And, God willing, something more.

Her Story

HER meeting went well.

The up and coming producer wanted to hire her to write a script for his company for not very much money.

The story line the producer gave her to write was pretty flimsy too but she was a great writer wasn't she.

She would make it great!

* * *

Of course, there was no one in the apartment when she came home, save the cats and herself.

She missed him.

She wanted to tell him all about her day.

Compared to his career she knew she didn't have much to tell, but it was something.

* * *

Time passed.

Days, weeks, months.

At first

She thought of him every day.

And then.
every other day.

And then.
every day.

The feelings she had for him did not diminish, did not lessen one bit but she learned to compartmentalize her emotions.

~ She thought of him only at night.

~ Or when she saw his photograph.

~ Or he appeared on TV

~ Or when she saw the beach at dawn.

~ or a beautiful sunset

~ or heard a love song.

* * *

Claudia seemed to be always by his side. Rumors of their coming marriage continued.

She thought she would die if they married.

* * *

And then she couldn't seem to dream about him anymore.

She realized she was afraid she would appear in his room and find Claudia in his arms.

She met William. He was a writer too. They went to dinner and the movies. They talked about their dreams. They laughed a lot.

She told herself she was getting over *him* and getting on with her life. She even *almost* believed the lie.

* * *

And then late one afternoon in October she found herself in the Z, driving up Pacific Coast Highway toward Malibu.

His Story

FOR him every moment seemed to last an hour,

Every hour a day,

Every day a month.

Time was his enemy.

He kept busy.

He did films back to back.

He grew closer to Claudia. They talked about her moving in.

She was never out of his thoughts but she stopped coming.

He didn't know why.

And he didn't know how to bring her back.

Sometimes, he could barely remember her face.

He wished he knew her first name so he could call it out in his agony.

His own Cinderella.

* * *

And then,

Late one afternoon, while Claudia was in New York, he sat on the beach in front of his house and stared at the ocean. The fog rolled in, obliterating the houses that rose behind him like man made sand dunes.

The afternoon stretched into early evening.

He went inside for a large cup of hot coffee to ward off the chill and then returned to his spot on the sand. He thought about *her.*

He wondered where she was, *who she was with.*

And, as always, he wondered why she had left him—and more important,—why she stayed away.

The white mist grew so thick he could feel himself beginning to blur. And still he stayed there on the beach.

Waiting.

Always waiting.

* * *

He *felt* her next to him before he saw her.

He looked around.

He was alone.

He couldn't be.

If he knew anything; he knew when she was near.

He turned and looked around again.

Was that the ghostly image of her red Z on the road above his house?

He concentrated on his breathing.

Slow. In. Out.

Deep breaths.

In. Out.

His pulse raced.

Should he go inside the house and look for her?

Should he wait for her here by the ocean . . . ?

He wasn't sure what to do.

There seemed to be rules that no one had explained to him.

What were the rules?

He didn't know.

He closed his eyes and prayed with all his heart.

Dear God, let her be here with me, now.

* * *

And suddenly she was.

There.

Sitting next to him.

She was wearing a green sweater over a white shirt, tan slacks and tennis shoes. Her hair was long again—a little past her shoulders. She wore it loose.

He was afraid to move. Afraid she would disappear into the fog if he tried to talk to her. The pain he felt was exquisite.

Could he put his arms around her? Should he?

Was he awake? Was she real?

Was she a mirage?

Had he finally lost his mind?

Did she know who he was?

It had been so terribly long.

He didn't know what to say; wasn't sure what to do.

* * *

And then his arm was around her and she was leaning against him.

They nestled into each other as though they had never been apart.

She turned in his arms and kissed him
and with that kiss
it *was New Years Eve all over again.*

And all of the pain and the anger and the frustration of the last year vanished in that instant.

* * *

She was there and all of his questions were forgotten.

She took his hand and held it to her face.

She turned his palm to her mouth and kissed it. She looked up at him; tears in her eyes. A smile on her lips.

Still holding his hand against her, she used her other hand to trace his mouth and then she kissed him again.

She told him how much she had missed him.

* * *

He had so many questions.

But he could no longer remember what any of them were.

All he knew at that moment,

All that mattered to him at that moment,
was the love he felt for her.

AND

The love he knew she felt for him.

This love.

This moment.

This kiss.

Was worth everything.

Everything.

He would take any risk to keep this moment forever.

* * *

They stood as one and walked hand in hand across the sand, into the house; through the kitchen and into the living room.

They stopped in front of the darkened fireplace that seemed to magically burst into flamed light. Soft music filled the room.

They stayed there, in the living room, stretched out ,side by side on the traditional rug in front of the roaring fireplace.

The music wove itself around them, filling the air with words of love.

He kissed her lips, her eyes, the tip of her nose, her wrist . . .

He searched for other places to kiss—other ways to make this moment last.

His breath caught when she raised the sweater over her head and removed it.

She stood before him and began to unbutton the shirt with slow deliberate movements.

Her eyes never left his.

He was on fire!

She smiled seductively and held the shirt out to her side by her fingertips and let it fall to the floor. The shirt was soon joined by her shoes, socks, and then slacks. All removed with a tantalizing slowness

She stood before him, a wondrous vision in green lace bra and bikini briefs. She knelt before him, framed his face with her hands and kissed him again as his fingers clumsily removed first the bra and then slowly, provocatively, the briefs.

And then she pressed up against him, her arms around his neck, her hand at the back of this head, and she kissed him with passion and desire.

* * *

His fingers gently caressed her face, then drifted slowly down her neck, across her shoulders; traced the curves of her breasts. Her breath caught.

His lips teased hers, barely touching, dusting her eyes, her lips, the edges of her mouth, her chin with feathery kisses.

His hands moved sensuously across the top curve of her breast, down her rib cage, around to her back, weaving magic with his every touch.

One hand caressed her arm while the other wound itself in her hair as they came together in a crescendo of passion and longing.

Her skin in the firelight glowed; her hair was turned to molten gold.

In his arms she was forever yielding, passionate, loving.

* * *

He leaned away from her so he could look at her. Memorizing every facet of her face, every subtle nuance of her body. He gathered her into his arms and kissed her.

It was the perfect moment.

He told her how much he had missed her.

He used his body and hers to create a spell between them that could never be broken.

They made love.

They made magic all over again.

It was a night of wonder.

* * *

Much later they showered together and he held her tightly in his arms, afraid to close his eyes for fear she would have vanished when he opened them.

She stayed in is arms, wet hair plastered to her head, her skin silky wet from soap and water.

She glistened in the glow from the candle light.

She bathed him; she loved him.

And he loved her in return.
and they laughed.

How they laughed.

They made love and spoke of love all through the long marvelous night.

And yes, in the early pre dawn she sliced bagels and oranges, poured champagne and orange juice.

* * *

As the sky began to turn to the orange with pink stripes of dawn they lay on his bed. He held her in his arms and she spoke soft words of love to him as he fell asleep.

* * *

When he woke he found himself alone in the big bed and she was gone.

* * *

The only thing left of her was the shirt she'd worn beneath her sweater. He held it to him; a drowning man hanging onto a life line, and inhaled her perfume.

She was real.

She did exist.

And no matter what else she loved him as much as he loved her.

But where was she?

Who was she?

And why did she keep leaving him alone with only memories.

Her Story

THE radio was playing and she woke to The Everly Brothers singing about dreams.

She turned the radio up, stretched languidly in the bed and listened.

Her eyes remained shut. As though she could will herself to be in the bed next to him only so long as she did not allow any other reality to touch them.

She could still feel the warmth of his body next to hers on the big bed. She still smelled of his cologne and her lips were puffy from their love making.

Slowly she opened her eyes; a silent prayer on her lips.

Please God

Her prayer went unanswered.

She was home

In her own bed

Alone!

Tears ran down her face.

Her clothes were tossed on the bed next to her.

Her sweater held the lint from his fireplace rug and her tennis shoes had sand in them.

Yet later when she dressed and went down to the garage to get her car, the odometer on the red Z told her she had not left home.

And

She didn't know where her favorite shirt was.

* * *

She didn't go back to the beach.

Not in person and not in her dreams.

But she played the memories of New Years Eve and that October night over and over on the VCR of her mind.

Could anyone ever love the way they loved each other and be real?

She didn't know.

She stopped seeing William and began writing a new screenplay.

* * *

And then, once again, her life changed.

The script she'd been hired to write early that summer was being produced and she suddenly found herself on the movie set, working with the producer and director to bring her words to life.

It was exciting.

She discovered she had a lot of things in common with Greg, the director of the film. They laughed at the same jokes, they both loved cool jazz, rock and roll, Frank Sinatra and the color blue.

Greg thought she was brilliant and she appreciated that.

They talked about having an affair.

They talked about falling in love.

* * *

They made the movie and fall turned to winter.

She told herself she was over the hump.

Life was going to keep getting better.

And then

New Years Eve approached and Greg asked her to go with him to a party in Beverly Hills.

Claudia

Claudia returned from New York to find him happier than he'd been in a long time.

She discovered the shirt in his room, tucked under his pillow. She wanted to ask him about it, but she was afraid to.

She recognized the perfume that still lingered on its collar. She remembered smelling it on the woman in the kitchen.

The woman who sliced oranges and sang in showers but wasn't real.

Claudia wondered if he was being haunted or possessed by a spirit from another world. She didn't know if she even believed in such things.

She didn't know what to do or say, so she did nothing.

She kissed him hello and enjoyed his hug and they went to dinner.

That night when she lay in her canopied bed in her apartment in Brentwood, she tried to pretend the shirt wasn't there and tried not to be hurt that he didn't want her to stay at the beach with him or hold her in his arms.

His Story

HE was supposed to start a new film in Atlanta in November, but said he didn't want to leave town until after the first of the year.

Then he surprised everyone, including himself, by taking Claudia to Aspen for skiing over Thanksgiving.

He refused to leave town over the Christmas/New Years holidays. He wasn't sure what he was waiting for or what he was expecting to happen.

But he was sure he wanted to be there when and if it did.

* * *

The end of the year was almost upon them and he still didn't know what he intended to do about it. Last New Years Eve he'd gone to an incredibly boring party and spent the entire evening looking for her.

And never found her.

Did he really want to put himself through that again?

Why was she making him put himself through that again!

He listened to The Everly Brothers sing about dreams until he thought the CD would wear out.

He lay alone in his bed at night and tried to follow the songs advice.

But dreams weren't what he was looking for.

He wanted her.

That night she *really* had been here. He *had* held her in his arms. He *really had* kissed her. And she *had* kissed him.

they did make love.

That night was no dream.

She was not an imaginary creature.

She was real.

But where was she?

And where would she be on New Years Eve?

Her Story

SHE didn't know what to do. Christmas was a week away and New Years one week beyond that.

Last year she'd let herself be dragged off to a friend's party on New Years and had a horrid time.

This year?

Could she risk it?

What if *He* came to the same party—with Claudia?

Would it be too obvious if she asked Greg if there was even a remote chance . . . but then Greg would want to know why and she wouldn't be able to tell him.

She liked Greg and he was real.

She wasn't so sure about *him*.

* * *

On Christmas Eve she had dinner with friends and then met Greg for coffee.

Greg wanted to come home with her. He wanted to spend the night.

She told him no. She said she had a tradition since her divorce of spending Christmas Eve alone.

That wasn't the truth of course.

The truth was she had been thinking about *him* all day and she didn't want to give up her thoughts. She wanted to hold him close to her as long as possible

Besides, she had a *feeling*. She couldn't describe it, she couldn't explain it—but there it was. She had to spend Christmas Even alone.

Just in case something miraculous happened.

She promised to meet Greg for breakfast Christmas morning at his house in Santa Monica.

Greg kissed her. He told her he wanted their relationship to go forward; for her to feel about him the way he did about her.

She told him she knew that but she wasn't sure she was ready for a relationship right now.

He asked her to think about it and she promised she would.

* * *

And so it was that

At midnight she sat all alone in front of her Christmas tree and opened the gifts from her parents and other family and friends.

She hated this. Why was she doing this? She didn't have to be alone.

Yes she did.

If not with him. . . .

It was getting late; she should probably go to bed. Whatever it was that she'd been expecting to happen; hadn't.

Oh well.

Sinatra sang 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas'

And

She made her Christmas wish

"*Please God, this year for Christmas . . .* "

. . . and blew out the two candles on the mantle of the gas fireplace in her new apartment.

She sighed a deep sigh and turned around

. . . and into his waiting arms.

* * *

She was so startled she jumped backwards, stumbled and he caught her, fell with her still in his arms, to the floor. They both laughed.

She asked him where he'd come from.

He said he didn't know and he didn't care.

The only thing that mattered was that he was so glad to be here with her. Now.

He kissed her tenderly and asked her if she was real.

She held him tightly and kissed him back and asked him if he thought she felt like anything but real.
and he agreed that oh, yes, she definitely felt real!

They kissed,

They loved,

Theysoared.

* * *

Later, he asked to see her apartment.

She poured glasses of champagne and they strolled through the rooms.

Living room with fireplace. Office space with computer. Kitchen with dining area.

And, finally,

The Bedroom with the giant bed being protected by one large black and white cat and one small gray one.

The cats looked at him with their green eyes,

She looked at him with her green eyes.

They toppled on the bed and he kissed her.

The telephone rang.

* * *

It was Greg.

He wanted to wish her Merry Christmas.

When she hung up the phone she was alone again.

She cried until there were no tears left.

And then she cried some more.

His Story

ON Christmas Eve he spoke to Claudia at her parents home in Vermont.

He turned on the radio and leaned back in front of the fire. and closed his eyes.

Sinatra sang "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas"

He tried to conjure her up. To pull her dream self into his arms.

And suddenly she was there.

She turned from a fireplace and into his waiting arms.

But he wasn't here.

He was in a strange apartment.

Not that it mattered.

All that mattered was she was there and so was he.

He caught her when she stumbled, held her, fell with her, laughed with her

kissed her, loved her.

* * *

After the loving, he told her he wanted to see the apartment. To get some idea of who she was.

If this be fantasy, he thought, then let me have it all. Let me have something to keep with me. Some way to see her when he was alone with only his memories to keep him warm . . .

When they finally arrived at the bedroom and he met her cats he looked into all three sets of green eyes and laughed with joy.

He hugged her and collapsed onto the bed with her, kissing her, feeling her beneath him.

The telephone rang.

* * *

It was Claudia wishing him a Merry Christmas.

And he was once again back in his all too empty house at the beach.

Alone again.

That Christmas Eve changed everything for both of them.

His Story

HE knew he couldn't continue like this and survive.

If she was a ghostly manifestation then he wanted to die and join her.

If she was real he wanted—no, he needed desperately, with every fiber of his being—to find her; to be with her.

If she was an illusion—well, if she was an illusion then he needed to put her aside and get on with living.

He made the first step toward a break.

* * *

He called his best friend in the world.

The one who never laughed at the most bizarre private dreams they had shared growing up.

The one who knew him when and knew him now.

The one who had been observing him with concern while this love affair—if indeed that was what you called this—played itself out.

The friend listened to everything he had to say without comment.

When confronted with the hard evidence of the shirt the friend rearranged some of his thinking about what to say.

Finally he spoke.

The friend said

You should consider that this woman only comes to you at very odd times. You know nothing about her. She never tells you anything about herself.

I know she seems real, but how real can she be? I think she represents a safe love for you. No hard choices.

Claudia is right here, she's real and she loves you. Give up this fantasy and live your life.

I know you think you love this woman but if she's real and if she really loves you, why does she run away?

How can she be real?

And even if she is real and this is a mixture of reality and fantasy you can't escape the fact that she leaves.

She acts like a married woman having an affair. Had he considered that?

She makes your life miserable.

Claudia is real. She is there for you. Go for it. I am worried for you; all of us have been worried for some time.

Grab onto life. For all our sakes. Make a future for yourself

Claudia loves you.

* * *

His friend made perfect sense.

Of course his friend had never met *her.*

His friend for all his good intentions and good advice had *never*

~ laid next to her,

~ held her in his arms,

~ shared her kisses. . . .

His friend thought he knew about the pain.
b*ut*

His friend had never experienced the sheer joy of being in her presence. . . .

~ Never shared the Love.

Her Story

GREG pushed a little harder.

He was in love. He wanted to know why she was holding him at arms length. She had strong feelings for him, he could tell. So what was the problem. God knows he, had been patient but how much longer did she expect him to wait?

Make a decision. One way or the other.

New Years Eve is the deadline.

* * *

In desperation she talked to the one friend she could trust.

The friend was sympathetic but didn't know what to say except the obvious.

Let's face it, she said, you can't be sure this other man really knows you exist or cares.

In fact you aren't really sure any of it was real beyond that New Years Eve—or even if that was real.

Her failed marriage had obviously scarred her more than she was willing to admit.

This fantasy lover was so much safer than having to deal with a real relationship, wasn't it.

Greg is real and he cares for you.

You deserve happiness! Go for it.

Live in reality.

It would make her much happier.

Her friend made sense.

* * *

~ But then her friend had never made love with him.

~ Never stood in the dark with his arms around her

~ Never felt two hearts beat as one.

~ Never experienced that absolute sensation of total love . . .

* * *

On the other hand . . .

He didn't know who she was.

He didn't share her dreams.

And he was probably going to marry Claudia and then what would she do.

* * *

On the other hand, if she decided to let Greg into her life, how much, if anything should she tell him? How could he understand?

Maybe she could tell him part of it as though it were all fact.

She practiced.

* * *

She would tell him that she had met this man one night. They spent the night together and she fell in love with him.

Since then we've seen each other once—twice. it's over. But I think I might still be in love with him.

You need to know that.

Greg listened to it all on New Years Eve.

Then he held her and kissed her and said he knew they would be happy together.

She went with him into the bedroom and they made love for the first time. It was 10:00 in the evening in Los Angeles. 1:00 AM New Years morning in Vermont.

She had not idea why that fact occured to her.

Greg was gentle, loving and caring.

Did it really matter that she thought of h*im* during their Love making instead of Greg?

After all, didn't the experts say fantasies were good for relationships?

* * *

Later that same night -that same New Years Eve she went to the party with Greg.

She wore a green dress.

A different green dress.

There were rumors *he* was going to be at the party.

Claudia was back east so he would be alone.

* * *

Her heart ached all night and by the end of the evening when he hadn't appeared she was so tense she experienced her first migraine headache.

It was a hideous experience and one, she felt, said it all.

Greg was the one who was there with her, holding her hand, whispering soothing words to ease the pain.

* * *

She moved in with Greg the next week.

His Story

HE flew to Vermont on New Years Eve.

Ran away from his last hope of ever finding her.

* * *

Could he stand to spend another evening at still another News Year Eve Party with her not there; with so many people he tried to fit into her image?

He could not.

So he flew to Vermont and spent New Years Eve at a party with Claudia.

CLAUDIA

CLAUDIA didn't know why he insisted on being by her side all evening or why he held onto her so tight, but she didn't complain.

She was in love and she dared to hope that maybe at last he had given up on the apparition in the kitchen.

That night they made love for the first time.

It was 1:00 AM when they first went to bed together. 10:00 PM in Los Angeles.

She didn't understand why he made the comparison of time. Or even why he noticed the time at all . . .

* * *

And if later, in his sleep, she heard him call out *'Cinderella come back to me"'* she told herself it would pass and they would build a life together. They would put all of this, whatever this was, behind them and go forward.

Once again she was right.

And once again she was wrong.

* * *

The next day he took Claudia for a long drive to a country inn in Maine. They had an excellent dinner and then he said they had to talk.

He told her everything.

All of it.

The unvarnished truth.

He left nothing out.

Not the way he felt then,
nor the way he felt now.

He said he didn't know if she was real or not and he didn't care.

He would always love her.

He emphasized *always.*

But, if Claudia was willing to take a chance on him, knowing all the facts, then he would like her to move in with him when they got back to L.A.

Marriage?

He didn't think so.

Well, maybe someday. But not now.

He couldn't totally cut himself off from all hope that he would never see her again. He wasn't ready to take that step yet.

Not yet.

In his heart he said: N*ot ever.*

He asked Claudia to think it over and let him know.

* * *

Claudia kissed him and told him her answer was yes.

She promised him that if the mystery woman ever came back into his life and she was real she, Claudia, would wish them the best and then leave.

Claudia did not tell him about the woman in the kitchen, or that she too had smelled the perfume on the shirt.

Some things, she decided, are better left unsaid.

Maybe she was right.

* * *

They moved forward from that time,

Each in his/her own life.

His Story

CLAUDIA moved into the beach house as soon as they returned from Vermont and they set up a life together.

She never came back to his dreams.

* * *

But her having been in his life, however briefly, however real, had changed his life forever.

That shared love altered the kind of films he chose to make. It made him get more in touch with his emotions and thereby deepened his acting ability and his life's expectations.

He gravitated to the more spiritual religions realizing that conventional dogma could not adequately explain what he had experienced.

Life was better.

And if, sometimes, he still felt the pain of her absence;

~ still longed for her touch . . .

Well, that was to be expected.

Wasn't it?

Her Story

LIFE with Greg turned out to be a lot better than she'd thought it would be.

At first she feared that having moved into Greg's world she would come face to face with *him* and Claudia at parties but that hadn't happened so far.

It never would.

She knew exactly how to fake that once real migraine and when to do it.

* * *

When she learned that Claudia had moved in with him—into the Malibu house.

Into the bed the two of them had shared,

She drove the Z up the coast, past his house at 90 miles an hour, to Santa Barbara, rented herself a room and cried for 2 days.

She told Greg she was doing research for a story.

If he didn't believe her he chose not to press her for more information.

Loving *him*, whether it was real or fantasy, had changed her.

* * *

She found she wrote now with greater depth, and deeper meaning. She tried to build on her experience with him, to use it as a starting point to getting more out of life.

~ And if sometimes she cried out in her sleep;

~ If sunsets didn't seem as beautiful to her anymore and she lost her passion for walking on the beach -

Well, some things take awhile to get over.

Don't they?

* * *

And then Greg asked her to marry him.

His Story

LIFE with Claudia kept getting better.

In an interview he said their relationship was one of the best things that had ever happened to him.

He meant that.

Claudia had saved his sanity; maybe saved his life.

Of course he had no way of knowing the pain that comment caused *her* when she read it.

* * *

Claudia's career began to really take off and they enjoyed each other's successes. He considered selling the beach house and found he couldn't do it. Couldn't give up that link with *her.*

But they moved into an apartment in town and only used the beach house sporadically.

Sometimes he went there alone and paced the rooms and the beach outside for hours.

Searching
Waiting.

Searching

* * *

If Claudia knew about this she didn't say.

* * *

And then suddenly it was fall again.

Claudia was offered the opportunity to do a fashion television special for the *E Channel*. She asked him to come with her to New York but he said he couldn't possibly.

He was getting ready to do a new film.

And besides, he had signed up for a long weekend at The Center for Spiritual Enlightenment located in Big Sur.

In his search for spiritual guidance and in an attempt to understand more fully what had occurred in his life, he had talked to psychics, to healers, to spiritual leaders of all shapes and sizes.

Attending the weekend at the Center was something he had planned for a long time. He couldn't miss it.

He hoped she understood.

She said of course she understood.

Their life styles created a lot of temporary separations but that only kept their relationship new and romantic.

And so on the day Claudia left, they kissed each other good-by while the limo driver waited. They made plans for her return. They decided on a romantic dinner at Ivy on the Shore.

Everything was wonderful.

Absolutely wonderful!

Which didn't explain why she cried all the way to New York and felt as though her life with him was ending.

Her Story

IT was one thing to live with Greg. It was something else all together different to marry him.

She didn't think she could.

She told him she needed some time.

She was working on her script. Her long ago baby. The one she had first started writing just before that fateful New Years Eve and put aside for so long.

It would be an important movie. She knew it.

She couldn't write with the pressure of Greg looking over her shoulder, she said, and waiting impatiently for an answer to his proposal.

She told him she needed to get away to finish the script and to think.

About the future.

About them.

She rented a small house in Big Sur from a friend and drove the still faithful Z up the coast. Her lap top computer was packed carefully in the back. Her notes were in her briefcase on the seat next to her.

Greg kissed her good-by and told her he loved her and that he knew she would make the right decision.

And she left.

She was running away again!
she knew that.

* * *

But if that were true, why did it feel as though she was running toward something for the first time in months?

His Story

HE flew to the Center in a helicopter.

For reasons unknown to him he asked the pilot to follow the Pacific Coast Highway up the coast. He told himself it was because the coastline was so beautiful.

Which didn't explain why he spent much of his time looking down at the highway instead of the ocean.

* * *

There weren't a lot of cars on the road at that hour so the red Z wasn't difficult to spot.

Of course there were a lot of red Z's in the world.

He certainly had become an expert on that fact. But had he ever felt this way before about a car? He watched the Z speed up the coast highway.

He couldn't tell who was driving. The tinted T-tops were still in the car.

It took all of his self-restraint to not insist the pilot land the helicopter in front of the Z.

He reasoned with himself.

Months had gone by without any thought of her . . .

O.K., without much thought of her.

She was part of his past.

She had to be.

But would she ever be?

* * *

The pilot swerved off to the right, leaving the coast behind and they sped on, landing less than an hour after take off.

Perhaps he was in greater need of spiritual guidance than he had originally thought.

Her Story

WHEN she first heard the helicopter overhead she thought she was about to get a speeding ticket. Considering the way she drove she actually had gathered very few of them since buying the car.

She slowed down to 10 miles an hour above speed limit and hazarded a glance up through the T-top. She could tell by its markings that it was a commercial or private helicopter so she built her speed back up to 90 miles per hour and climbing.

She did love her red Z.

Greg had tried to get her to sell it. He'd even surprised her with a cute little BMW. She hated BMWs. She told him to drive it himself.

The red 280 Z suited her; she suited it.

And just maybe, she admitted privately, she also refused to give it up because it was her last link with the past—with him.

Now, with the sound of the helicopter rotors overhead she experienced a sudden flash of "them" together that last time at his beach house. The memories were vivid and brought with them a rush of feelings.

Oh, God, what was that line from the Barry Manilow song? oh, yes.

"*.and all I could taste was love the way we made it . . .* "

She could feel the heat from the fireplace, hear Mathis singing as they lay next to each other.

Was it really October again?

Had it been a year?

* * *

Above her she heard the helicopter veer off and head inland.

It had been a busy year.

When she first started getting offers to write for major studios and producers she thought her work would invariably bring the two of them face to face sooner or later.

It hadn't happened.

If she were honest with herself she didn't know if that was a blessing or a curse.

* * *

She poured everything she had into her work.

She kept to herself.

And now she was back at work on this project that had always meant so much to her.

* * *

Life with Greg had proven to be much better than she had anticipated. She itemized his attributes as she sped down the highway.

He liked to hold her.
He didn't get crazy when she cried.
He loved old movies as much as she did.

And in general made he her life a better place to be.

But was that reason enough to marry him?

Greg loved her, she was certain of that.

And she still loved *him*.

She was even more certain of that.

She consulted the map for directions, turned off the highway at the proper place and drove down the dirt lane to the waiting cottage.

The house sat on a cliff overlooking ocean. Wooden steps led down to the beach that was completely covered at high tide.

When her friend, a successful artist who spent most of his time in Europe, agreed to let her occupy the house, he gave her a detailed list of the times the beach was safe to walk on.

He warned her about the severe undertow and cautioned against surf walking. He said the beach was for looking at and being inspired by and he didn't feel comfortable even thinking she might want to go swimming there.

She'd reminded him it was October and that she had a lot of work to do so she didn't plan on any swimming. Thus assured, he told her where the keys were hidden and said she could stay as long as she liked since he planned to spend the rest of the year in Rome.

And now here she was.

She parked the car and used the keys she found in the designated niche in the brick fireplace chimney.

It was a little after 2 in the afternoon. Plenty of daylight left for exploring and getting settled.

The inside of the house was all white and bleached wood. A large living room/dining room, good sized kitchen with all the amenities and a master bedroom and bath. All of these rooms shared ocean views through large semi-tinted glass windows. A long porch of weathered wood ran the length of the house with doors leading to it in the kitchen, living room and bed room area.

She set up her laptop on the dining room table and began unpacking the rest of her things.

* * *

She knew she should call and let Greg know she had arrived but she put if off while she started a fire in the huge stone and wood fireplace that filled one corner of the living room.

When she could put it off no longer she called Greg and assured him she was fine. She wouldn't give him the number because she said it would interrupt her work if he called. For that same reason she explained she had also left the cel phone at home.

She knew Greg was worried but there was nothing she could do about that.

* * *

According to the tide chart she still had half an hour before the beach was too dangerous to walk on. She grabbed her coat and ran down the wooden steps to the sand below.

His Story

THE cabin they assigned him was surprisingly comfortable. One bedroom and a bath. There was a sturdy wooden double bed. A reading chair with appropriate lamps and a dresser and closet.

He was surprised the room was as spacious as it was. He'd expected something far more Spartan.

* * *

The guided tour was arranged for early that afternoon.

The spiritual counselor assigned to him for the weekend introduced himself as Jim and explained that for the weekend everyone would be on a first name only basis.

They drove around the 100 + acres of grass, creek, rocks and trees in a jeep.

Jim parked the jeep on an overlook and pointed to the ocean sparkling in the distance. He said it was actually only about a ten or 15 minute drive and the jeep was available any time he wanted it. *The keys are always in it.*

On the way back to the Center Jim told him the few rules. No phones. No business. No last names. Dinner was at 6:00 sharp but if one missed dinner they could always grab a sandwich from the kitchen.

In response to his questions about what to expect this weekend, Jim explained they were all just seekers helping each other find the way, encouraging each other to be open to all the possibilities of life.

He found that very appealing and reassuring somehow. He felt an immediate camaraderie with Jim and the others and he looked forward to the rest of the weekend.

When they got back to the compound, dinner was still an hour away. He thought about taking the jeep and driving down to the beach. He had a sudden yearning to be near the water. However, if he went, he knew he would never get back in time for dinner and he wanted to not miss his first opportunity to meet his fellow seekers, so he spent the time hanging up his few clothes and meditating.

Her Story

SHE wrote all evening, forgetting dinner, forgetting the time. At 2:00 in the morning she realized she was starved but it was too late to eat so she grabbed a couple of oreos and drank a Diet Coke

The bed was so comfortable, and she was so tired, she fell into a dreamless sleep immediately.

* * *

She was up again at 7:00, famished. She prepared a large breakfast of eggs and sliced ham, hash browns and toast, orange juice and a large iced Diet Coke.

And then since the beach was still covered with water, she contented herself by walking the cliffs above the ocean for about a mile before turning back to the house and work.

On the return walk to the house, she looked to the east. She thought she saw several buildings nestled in the hills on the other side of the highway and she felt mysteriously drawn to it.

She went back into the house. She ate an oreo. And then, iced diet coke by her side, she went back to work.

His Story

HE was up and dressed by 5:00 A.M. Breakfast was at 6:00. At 7:00 he spent an hour in solitary meditation.

He was relaxed and eager when Jim knocked on his door and asked him if he wanted to go for a walk.

It was not turning out to be the kind of weekend he'd imagined.

Truth be told, he had half expected a lot of dogma and lectures and group therapy type stuff but the reality was more of a communing with nature and with yourself and others.

There were great conversations among the guests and counselors on almost every topic imaginable from sports to war to women.

And ultimately to love and its place in the universe and how all of this inter-related to the universal spirit. Although these men were for the most part, men of power and fame, he

was touched at the reverence and awe most of them placed on True Love.

It seemed he wasn't the only man in the world who wanted, and didn't have a clue how to find, the fairy tale ending.

As the day wore on, he had the distinct feeling Jim was watching him and waiting for something to happen.

Or was he the one who was waiting?

And if so, for what?

Her Story

IN spite of the fact that it was one of those glorious summer days that happen often in October in California,. she worked without stopping until early afternoon.

The re-write was going faster than expected. Good. Maybe she would finish the script early and spend the rest of her time at the beach thinking.

By 1:30 she knew she could not ignore the sunshine and sparkling water any longer.

She fixed herself a ham sandwich with mustard on rye, grabbed a bag of chips, an apple and a cold diet coke and put it all in her knapsack next to a notebook, pen and a paperback she wanted to read.

She trekked it all down the beach.

About a mile up the beach she discovered a small alcove

nestled against the cliffs. The alcove, a sort of half cave, provided shade and sheltered her from the sea breeze.

She spread the blanket, unpacked her lunch, popped the Diet Coke can, and sat down, her back braced against the cliff. She opened the book and read while she ate.

From time to time she would put the book aside to look at the ocean. It was beautiful. Green blue; soft white foam.

* * *

She wasn't aware of her eyes growing heavy. She merely decided it would be more comfortable if she lay down on the blanket while she read.

It wasn't much longer before she'd fallen asleep.

His Story

HE was restless.

He kept looking up at the clear blue sky, searching for storm clouds.

He didn't know why.

The official start of the rainy season was over a month away. Yet, he continued to scan the sky for clouds.

* * *

At four that afternoon when they broke up the session to take a meditation break he went back to his room and laid down across the bed.

He fell asleep almost immediately.

He didn't know what woke him.

Her Story

THE water woke her up.

It swirled up on either side of her, creating a small dry island and then rushed back to join its parent ocean. One childish rivulet diverted from its path and splashed her face.

At first she thought someone had tossed water on her and jumped up startled. She watched, astonished, as her back pack floated past her and out to sea.

The book she'd been reading was long gone.

She didn't know how long she'd slept but during her nap the sky had changed dramatically!

What had been blue was now gray and growing darker by seconds.

Storm clouds had moved in.

Impossible. It didn't storm in October in California. The official start of the rainy season wasn't until November and it actually seldom *really* rained before late December, early January.

Everyone knew that!!

She quickly gathered up her blanket and headed for the house.

It was then she realized she was trapped.

* * *

Her recess in the bluffs was no longer just a shelter from the wind. It had become the only still dry spot of land on what had been only hours earlier a beach.

Suddenly, the water grabbed her feet with a sharp undertow, nearly toppling her and reducing the sand still more.

A large clap of thunder and lightening tore the sky in equal parts! The sky opened and rain pummeled her skin, drenching her in a matter of seconds

The sand grew smaller still.

She opted to run for home before the water got any deeper.

In a few short steps she realized she'd never make it. The water quickly rose to her knees when she left the higher ground.

She was in a very precarious situation. She stopped

going forward and stood still and looked around quickly assessing her situation.

Another angry wave snatched her into the whirling waters and began dragging her out to sea. Yet another wave threw her back.

She managed to get to her feet, sputtering up water and gasping for breath.

A wind as angry as the sea itself whipped around her; her teeth chattered in the cold and she wrapped the blanket around herself and tied it. Even though it was as wet as she was, it still provided some modicum of warmth.

She fought the fierce undertow and just managed to make it back to her small purchase of diminishing sand.

She glanced around in growing fear.

The 'cave' was only a few feet deep and ended in bedrock.

She considered her choices.

Waves crashed against the cliffs further down the beach -away from her borrowed home. No point in going in that direction unless you could walk under water.

Going back the way she came was also out of the question. The waves were even more ferocious in that direction. She sighed and faced the cliffs behind her.

There was no place to go but up.

Option number three. The only one left.

The bluff.

It stretched above her. She guessed it to be seventy feet at least. Maybe higher. The highest point around she remembered her friend mentioning.

Pockmarked with erosion, this was no climber's cliff.

A wave slammed against her back and knocked her to the ground.

She didn't have any other choices. She knew she could not make it back to the house. Water stretched for miles in either direction. And she didn't have any time left to come with any other ideas either.

She desperately sought some way up the side of the cliff.

After several failed attempts she managed to locate foot and hand holds and pulled-pushed herself with excruciating slowness,

A short way up the cliff face, she paused to rest on a small muddy ledge that threatened at any moment to dump her back into the raging sea below.

She looked down. And immediatley regretted doing so.

The beach had disappeared completely under several feet of turbulent ocean, with waves already cresting almost to her ledge.

She wished she could remember how high the water came at high tide. And when high tide was.

She had an awful premonition that in a storm like this, with high tide adding another 4 or 5 feet it would come much higher than she was now. Maybe even as high as the top of the cliff. Or close to. She would never survive if that were true.

AND THEN THERE WERE THE WAVES.

The waves loomed high above the ocean itself, cresting two, sometimes three or four feet and growing. For now, the white churning roaring water was crashing into the cliff just below her. But she was barely keeping ahead of the rising water.

Soon it would overtake her and it's force would plunge her into the sea.

She remembered stories of one of L.A.'s legendary storms when the waves hurled huge boulders through the windows of Gladstones, a famous beach restaurant.

AND THEN THERE WAS THE RAIN.

It came out of the sky with such force that the cliff was swiftly turned into muddy rivulets. Rocks and dirt slid by her. Twice she found rocks to hold onto, to pull herself up the cliff with, only to have them loosen in the downpour and break free when she tried to put her weight on them. She slid back down the cliff time and again, each time barely managing to stop her fall before it became uncontrollable.

She faced the bluff again and attempted to climb higher. Every inch gained seemed to take her hours.

When she thought she could go no farther, she found a long narrow fissure she could squeeze into.

She wedged herself into the crevice and rested. Here she was almost protected from the torrentous downpour.

She didn't know how much longer she could go on. She was already exhausted and she wasn't even half way to the top. Every step, every fall, took more and more out of her. How much could she possibly have left.

The weather was rapidly worsening. As impossible as that seemed.

More than anything, she wanted to stay where she was.

To wake from this nightmare and find herself safe and dry in her bed. She closed her eyes as if to make the wish a formal one.

The wind shifted and the rain turned and came straight at her. It struck with needle point ferocity. She started to cry. It wasn't fair.

She didn't want to die.

She especially did not want to die here.

Alone.

She sighed. She crept out of her lost shelter and once again began searching for a way to the top and safety. Her whole life she had been a fighter. She wasn't someone who gave up easily and she wasn't giving up now.

She climbed with newly found determination, which was augmented by her growing desperation.

After what seemed like hours, she felt her fingers barely inch over the top.

She groped blindly, searching for something, anything to hold on to.

Some way to pull herself up.

Her feet and hands explored for a firm spot to support her weight one small step higher.

She found a fairly large smooth rock jutting out from the side of the cliff, exposed by the rain. She tested it as best she could and then managed to crawl, climb, onto it.

The rock wiggled precariously and she gasped and pressed her body against the cliff wall, fingers buried in the mud. The rock steadied.

She took a deep breath, stretched on tippie-toes and reached up, up to the top of the cliff.

There was nothing there except wet grass. No brush or trees to hold on to for leverage.

When she tried grasping onto the edge of the cliff itself, the ground crumbled around her and collapsed, nearly taking her with it.

She clutched onto clumps of crab grass; small weeds. They all pulled free of the soggy ground.

There had to be something, someway.

She dug her fingers into the mud and she tried to pull herself up by sheer force of will.

Come on, God, help me help myself!

I'm doing my part; you do yours!

* * *

And then her fingertips found a small root and a large clump of weeds.

She tugged on it. It held.

She could barely grasp it with her fingers.

It wasn't much.

But it was something. She grabbed on and was about to attempt to rescue herself when

Suddenly! The rock she was standing on began to slip from under her feet!

She felt her body begin to sway backwards and she immediately jumped off the rock and slid down to her lower perch.

She hugged the wall of the cliff and held her breath as a different huge rock above her also began to wobble . . .

then began tumbling down the cliff, taking many smaller rocks with it.

The smaller rocks and pebbles rained down on her head and shoulders. She prayed the large rock would not hit her.

She pushed her face into the side of the cliff, breathed mud and closed her eyes and prayed.

The mud and stone shower continued to rain down on her. She felt a sharp sting on her forehead and blood dripped down into her eye.

A large rock slammed into the back of her head and neck, then bounced off her back and buttocks before splashing into the sea.

She yelped in pain and fear and held on for her life!

The small avalanche stopped.

She was afraid to move. Afraid more rocks would fall on her and push her into the raging waters below.

Several deep breaths later she slowly edged herself away from the cliff wall and looked around and down.

She was still alive. Her small ledge was holding so far and. . . . she looked up and saw the top of the cliff just tantalizing feet above her reach.

The largest rock, the one she had been standing on had held. So far. She knew it was only a matter of moments before it too crashed to the sea.

She also knew with certainty that if she was under that rock when it fell, and it hit her, which it surely would if she either attempted to stay where she was now or followed the same path she had been on before, the rock would crush her head like a melon.

Now that the rain had washed away more of the dirt surrounding it, she could tell what a huge boulder it really was. When it went, which it would soon, it was going to take a large portion of the cliff with it into the sea.

She needed to find a different path to the top and she needed to find it now.

As if to emphasize that, the rock wobbled again and she watched in horror as it began to shake loose of its constraints.

She quickly scrutinized the area, searching for another angle, another direction.

The earlier small avalanche had changed the face of the cliff. There might be a way she could angle to the left . . .

She stretched her left leg out and up to a small crevice several feet above her.

By literally digging her fists into the muddy cliff she managed to gain enough leverage to swing her body up and over to another, larger ledge

The boulder that had been above her broke free of its surroundings and began its rapid descent, taking nearly half the face of the cliff with it.

The main rock missed her. She was not so lucky with the smaller ones. Smaller being a euphemism as some of the smaller rocks were the size of watermelons.

Her right arm was hit with such force that she momentarily thought it must be broken. Other rocks caused her many bruises and some very deep gashes and cuts.

Her former ledge was obliterated in the onslaught.

Looking at the carnage around her; realizing how close she had come to dying; how close she still was to dying, she scrunched down on her haunches and sobbed.

She had never been so afraid; felt so hopeless, in her life. She couldn't see how she was going to survive this.

Several deep breaths later and a lot of prayers and she slowly turned once again and continued her assent up the cliff.

Ten minutes later, she was once more at the top.

Once again she had to stretch to get her fingers over the top. Once again, she groped blindly, looking for some kind of major something that she could use to rescue herself.

She located a bush. She laughed. A bush! Thank God. Maybe. She pulled on the thickest part of the center stalk. It held.

The moment of truth.

The time to trust to God and herself, leave the relative safety of where she was and grab onto the root and somehow save herself.

It was no big deal, she told herself. Bruce Willis or Sly Stallone or even Tom Cruize could do it in a nano second.

She wasn't the most athletic person around, but she could do this. Somehow, she could and would do this.

Because the alternative was just not acceptable. "Failure is not a option" she quoted to herself.

She ordered herself to stay calm. She took a deep cleansing breath, closed her eyes for a silent prayer and then began the torturous ascent to the top and safety.

The moment her feet left the ledge and she found herself suspended by a clump of bush and nothing else she was too terrified to move and too terrified not too.

She pulled herself up—it was working. . . .

She was going to make it.

She was less than inches from sanctuary, one elbow was braced on the ground at the top, and she was just swinging her right leg up to gain more purchase, when the bush pulled free of the soaked earth, the ground beneath her arms crumbled and she began to fall.

She started to windmill. Flailing her arms and legs in total panic as she free-fell. She fought desperately to upright herself and twist her body until she was once again facing the cliff. Her arms striking and grabbing out for anything that might stop her before she disappeared forever into the raging waters below.

She snatched onto small outcroppings of dirt and weeds, boulders, mud, anything and everything that might possibly slow her descent.

Just when it seemed all was lost, she finally managed a clutched fingertip hold around a bush and she grabbed it, just managing to stop her plunge into the sea . . .

Her nail splintered and she screamed.

She hung dangerously out and over the edge, her hands wrapped tightly around the bush, the rest of her body dangling out over the water. Her legs scissored wildly as she tried to find solid ground. Her terrified screams were quickly absorbed by the raging storm.

Her hands slipped off the bush and she fell again, plummeting. Arms and feet scrambling for another bush, a rock, anything to grab onto—finally, crashing onto a narrow ledge fifteen feet further down the cliff. Her breath was knocked out of her. Her ribs hurt. She probed her chest. Sore, but not broken. She looked up.

The water tugged at her ankles trying to yank her off the ledge.

She barely managed to grasp onto the cliff itself to keep from flying out and into the angry waters of the Pacific Ocean. She shifted her weight to her left side and nearly collapsed when her leg buckled beneath her and she screamed in agony.

She fought for balance and shifted her weight back to the right.

She was afraid her leg was broken.

Turning slowly, inch by inch she fought for balance until she faced the ocean. She pressed her back into the side of the cliff and slowly scrunched down panting, fighting to regain a semblance of composure, not knowing what to do next.

There had to be another word beyond terror for the way she felt.

She stared at the boiling water just beneath her perch. The rain continued with intense savagery.

If the water doesn't wash me out to sea I'll freeze to death.

As if to remind her of that truth, her body shook with cold. She was in danger of going into shock. Already her body temperature was dangerously low. Hypothermia was becoming more and more another part of the equation.

She wasn't going to make it. It was impossible.

She was cold. She was weak. She was tired beyond belief. Her body was a battered mess. Her leg was broken, ribs cracked, she was covered with bruises and cuts. Some of the gashes in her head were still bleeding, so add loss of blood to everything else.

And on top of all that,

She was out of options. She didn't have the strength to attempt another crawl up the side of the rapidly deteriorating face of the cliff.

She used the edge of the soaked blanket to wipe the blood from her face. She didn't think there was one spot left on her body that hadn't been folded, stapled and mutilated.

His Story

Thunder woke him.

Lightening lit the sky in neon flashes of brilliance.

He sat up in a sweat.

Something was wrong!!

She was in danger!

* * *

He grabbed his coat and ran out of the cabin.

Should he get help?

There was no time.

For reasons he didn't understand, he ran back inside the cabin and grabbed the blanket off his bed. He tucked it

under his arm and ran across the lot to the car. He wished he had time to find a rope.

The storm had turned the day from light to inky black night.

The rain fell in sheets .

* * *

Already the Center was surrounded by streams of running water pebbles and mud.

A quick look into the back seat of the jeep confirmed there was a large flashlight there. The keys were in the ignition. That's all he needed.

He tossed the blanket onto the passenger seat and jumped behind the steering wheel. The engine caught on the first try, and he put the car into gear and sped away.

He was in such a rush that he forgot to shift the jeep into 4-wheel drive.

The steep dirt road leading to the highway had turned into a virtual waterfall of mud and loose stones in the unexpected downpour.

Halfway down the incline, the car hit a deep hole and careened into a sideways slide, threatening to tip over.

The steering wheel spun in his hands but he stayed calm and with supreme effort managed to get the car back under control and traveling forward once again.

* * *

The giant eucalyptus tree appeared out of nowhere

He collided into it with a resounding echo that could be heard above the raging storm.

His head snapped forward and crashed against the steering wheel.

* * *

He must have been unconscious for a second or two.

When he tried to sit back up blood ran down his face from the fresh gash on his head and he fell forward again.

He was dizzy, and nauseous. The world spun around him and he felt himself drifting away into darkness.

He forced himself back from the black abyss.

His head throbbed. The gash on his head bled profusely.

* * *

None of that mattered.

She needed him.

She would die if he didn't find her in time.

He ignored his own injuries. They were trivial compared to the life threatening danger she was in.

With the jeep now in four wheel drive, he managed to back up through the underbrush and get onto the dirt road. He drove as fast and as recklessly as he could and still make it to the highway without another accident.

He didn't have to think twice to know which way to turn when he reached the highway.

He just closed his eyes and listened to his heart.

His heart always knew how to find her

* * *

Maybe he should have asked for help -

But how could he explain?

She's somewhere near and she's in trouble and I have to save her??!!

They might have tried to stop him.

At the very least they would have slowed him down with questions and he couldn't take that chance. If he didn't get there in time, she was going to die. He knew that like he knew his name -

like he knew how much he still loved her.

Nothing had changed for him. Claudia was great. She was everything he could hope for in a woman.

But Claudia wasn't her. And his heart belonged now and always to her.

How could he have ever thought even for a second that that would change.

He abruptly made a sharp right hand turn and drove the car off the road and across the field toward the ridge.

When he saw it was too dangerous to drive any further for fear of running off the cliffs in the dark he stopped the car, scooped up the flashlight and the blanket and jumped out of the car and began running across the fields toward the edge.

The rain was icy cold on his face.

He couldn't even call her name!

He yelled into the wind, waving the light in front of him.

Searching for her.

He was desperate!

She would die if he didn't find her. He was sure of that. And if she died he wanted to die too.

He yelled again and then, just when he had almost given up hope he thought he heard her voice.

He fell into a mud hole, got up and stumbled on.

The rain soaked him through to the skin and he was covered with mud. His arm was bleeding. He didn't even notice.

He realized he'd dropped the flashlight when he fell and lost precious moments going back and looking for it.

He thought he heard her voice again but he couldn't tell where it was coming from or if he was only imagining hearing her in his fear.

He looked around wildly. Spinning in the rain.
Straining to hear.

Lightening ruptured the sky!

And then—just when he'd nearly given up all hope—in the eerie light of the storm, he saw Jim standing at the edge of the precipice pointing down over the ledge.

He ran over, looked down and
saw nothing.

He roared into the wind, shouting to Jim that he couldn't see anyone.

Jim continued to point over the cliff.

He laid down in the grass and mud and leaned over and out, flashing the beam at the steep sides.

He called to Jim again, but the gale force winds blew his words away before they could be heard.

* * *

He leaned out once more, stretching even further.

He flashed the light back against the wall of the cliffs.

Nothing

Nothing
and then

Something!

The bright beam managed to barely illuminate her as she huddled precariously against the cliff wall.

The angry waves were already attacking.

She was knee deep in water and the water continued to rise at a frightening rate.

* * *

He reached down to her.

NO!

She was too far away.

He had to reach her!

He couldn't bear to watch her die!

He lengthened his body as far as he could and stretched his arm as far as possible but she was still too far away.

He knew if he tried to climb down to get her there was every probability he would not only fall himself, but that he would push them both into the sea.

* * *

Jim shouted to him and

He remembered he was still carrying the blanket from his bed.

He shouted with joy. It would work! It would!

It had to! There were no other options.

He removed his belt and tied the blanket through the belt buckle. He pulled the blanket and the belt, yanking the knot viciously, making certain the knot would hold.

Then, leaning forward over the edge as far as he could, he shouted down to her.

He called her by that time honored name people use when they don't know what else to say

Hey! You! and then

Cinderella!!!

The belt slipped from his hands and over the cliff.

He tried to catch it but missed!

He watched in horror as the belt fell past her.

His only hope for rescuing her had just taken a swan dive into the ocean.!

Her Story

SHE thought she heard shouting . . .

She stared up through the rain and her own tears and saw *him.*

Him

She must be dead or dying!

How else could he be there with her.

A wave crashed into her, slammed her against the cliff, nearly taking her with it and proving to her she was indeed alive.

The cliff erosion had finally worked in her favor by exposing a giant tree root immediately to her left. She clutched on to that root, wrapping her arms through it for support.

That root and her fear filled grasp on it, was all that kept her from being washed away by the waves.

At least for now.

* * *

She looked back up, searching for him,. and saw what appeared to be a snake and a black parachute plummeting toward her. She lashed out to fend it off !

The belt landed hard in her hands, the buckle cutting her palm. The blanket fell over her head, blinding her, terrifying her!

She screamed and yanked the blanket from her face.

She almost threw the offending object away from her and into the ocean before she realized what it was!!

A life line!

She drew the blanket to her and wrapped it in her arms before it could follow the belt into the sea. She dragged the belt out of the water.

Her own rain-soaked blanket was immediately tied to his for added length. She tied the two blankets together, making the square knots her brothers had taught her so long ago.

Her hands were shaking so hard from cold and fear that she had trouble making the knots.

She tied the end of her blanket to her own belt then cinched the belt tightly under her arms in a fireman's' carry for support.

Now, if she could only throw it back up to him. She allowed herself a small light of hope.

Clutching desperately to the root, she leaned out from the cliff as far as she could and threw the belt up .up . . . up.

He grabbed for the belt,. missed and the buckle flew past her and into the water.

Fresh tears blended with the harsh rain. She gathered the blanket and belt and readied herself for another try.

She was too afraid. She knew she was going to miss. She couldn't throw it high enough; far enough.

She was going to drown.

There just wasn't any way she could hurl the blankets up to him. She didn't have the strength. She could barely stand. The elements were conspired against her. She knew that when she threw the blanket it was going to fall short again. It was an impossible task.

She closed her eyes and tried to resign herself to dying

Above her, his voice continued to be swallowed by the storm.

And then

There was a lull in the storm. Where there had been raging violence there was calm and silence.

His voice was as clear as if he was standing next to her.

You are not going to fail." He said. He told her he knew she was afraid. He was afraid too. He told her not to be afraid. He told her she could do it.

He told her he loved her and he knew she could do this. For herself. For him.

If she couldn't save herself for her; please do it for him. Because he could not bear to live in a world without her in it.

He was right. She could do it.

No! She could not do it.

They could do it.

They could do anything!

* * *

The storm returned full force. If anything it grew even worse.

The ledge crumbled beneath her foot and she edged to the side, maintaining her balance but just barely.

Pressing her back against the wall of the cliff, she gathered the blankets into a large loose ball and wrapped the belt around it. Three deep breaths and she tossed it up over

her head just like the backward, overhead toss of a basketball. Up into the basket, she prayed.

The blanket soared up, up.

No!

It was going to fall short!!

And there wasn't time for another attempt.

Beneath her the rest of her ledge was collapsing, giving into the demands of the storm.

She clung precariously to the root.

She heard the root crack under the strain.

The belt hung tantalizingly in the air, just inches from his outstretched hands.

He wasn't going to be able catch it.

She was going to die after all.

She tried to be heard above the storm, shouting the words.

Iloveyou. Iloveyou
And then . . .

He lunged

For a moment she thought he was going to take a

headlong leap off the top of the cliff. She closed her eyes in fearful prayer.

Not just for her, but for him. It would be too stupid for both of them to die like this.

The ledge dissolved beneath her, she lost her grasp on the tree root and she plunged into the ocean.

She sank deeper . . . deeper

* * *

Aboveher
his arm stretched
stretched . . .
and hand locked around the belt!

For a moment it looked as though he was going to somersault off the cliff itself. There seemed no way to prevent his tumbling over the edge and following her into the water.

At the last second, he managed to propel himself backward and he fell away from the cliff, still clutching the blanket tightly in his fist.

He quickly reversed himself and crawled forward to the cliff's edge.

He sat up, braced his legs.

* * *

She had given up all hope of survival when she felt her dive abruptly halt and she was suddenly jerked upward.

* * *

Slowly, slowly, up up, out of the water, up the side of the cliff.

They both prayed the knots and the blankets would hold.

His Story

HE brought her up to him, hand over hand. Braced against the wind, praying he would not fail; that his hands would not slip.

When he heard the blanket beginning to tear he tapped into strengths he didn't know he had and increased his pace.

Hand over hand, drawing her up and into the protection of his arms.

Nearer, nearer. . . .

The blanket ripped in half just as her head appeared over the side of the cliff, and he just managed to grab onto the belt and her arm in time to save her.

Their arms clasped, he dropped the blanket and kneeling in the mud, reached down and lifted her up and over the

cliff until, finally, *at last*, she was there, on the ground next to him.

He took her in his arms, and sheltered her from the driving rain and wind with his own body.

* * *

Her hair was plastered to her head.

Her face was wet with rain and tears. Her blouse and Levi's were torn. She was covered with dripping mud.

There were scratches and cuts and bruises everywhere.

She had never looked so beautiful!

No one had ever looked so beautiful!!

He kissed her face, Her hair, Her bruised hands, Her broken nails. She had the early signs of a major black eye and a nasty cut just above her cheek bone.

He kissed the cut. There was blood dripping from a gash in her head. And he kissed that too.

She winced. And kissed him back.

His tears mixed with hers.

Whatever else happened she was here now.

And she was alive!

Thank God she was alive!!!!
and

The bond between them still held.

* * *

They lay in each others arms, savoring their closeness, no longer mindful of the storm around them.

He thanked the Gods for her life and for her being there, finally, in his arms

Lying there in the mud and rain he kissed her again and again and again and told her of his undying, unwavering love.

Her Story

SHE was still kissing him when a loud roar of thunder and flash of lightening woke her up.

She was on the deck of the beach house, lying in the rain.

ALONE.

She tried to stand and fell back.

Her leg screamed in pain. His belt fell against her leg and she screamed again.

Her hand was bloody where the buckle had cut into it earlier.

She was soaked through to the skin and *he* was nowhere in sight.

But he had been there!

She had seen him.

He had saved her life.

And then he'd held her so close, so tight.

And told her of his love.

Lightening flashed again!

She passed out from exhaustion and pain.

* * *

When she woke again she was in her bed in the borrowed house and he was sitting on a chair next to her, holding her hand.

He told her he thought the leg might not be broken after all but she needed to get to a doctor.

A tall slender blond man was standing in the doorway. He smiled at her.

At her side, the love of her life, touched her hand and she turned all of her attention back to him.

His head was bleeding profusely. A jagged piece of glass stuck out of his bicep and blood dripped down the side of his arm.

She reached out to him. She touched his head gently. His blood dripped on her fingers. He was seriously injured. She tried to sit up, to hold him in her arms and . . . fainted

* * *

When she woke later she found her wounds had been cleaned and treated.

Her leg was expertly wrapped in a temporary split.

Every part of her body ached.

There was Tylenol and a just warming diet coke on a chair next to the bed. His blood was still drying on her fingers.

She kissed the blood and tasted him on her lips.

She looked around the room, listened for his sound and she knew . . .

She was once again
alone.

His Story

THUNDER and lightening were the reasons his sleep was disturbed too.

He woke to find himself lying in a hospital bed, his head wrapped in bandages. A nurse stood at the foot of his bed making notations in a folder. She smiled when she saw he was awake and asked how he was feeling

He told her he was feeling confused.

What was he doing in a hospital? He tried to sit up and fell back in pain. His head throbbed. His mouth was dry he told her.

The nurse handed him a glass of water and told him to relax that everything was fine and by the way he had a visitor.

Jim was sitting on a chair against the wall, facing the bed. They exchanged hellos and the nurse left.

In answer to *his* unspoken question, Jim explained that *he* was in a hospital in Big Sur. The injuries were not as extensive as the doctors had originally feared.

He said he didn't remember having an accident. He closed his eyes.

And then he did remember!

He sat up in bed too fast. He grabbed his head.

Where is she, he asked What room is she in? How is she? Is she all right? Could he see her?

Jim said he didn't know where she was.

He was about to say more but a nurse came into the room and interrupted him. She told Jim he would have to leave. Then she stuck a needle in the actor's arm and said he needed to get some rest.

Jim promised to return and said they could talk then.

* * *

True to his word, Jim walked into his room that evening. Even better, having experienced hospital food first hand himself, he brought contraband food with him. Chicken pitas, waffle fries and thick milkshakes. While they devoured the food Jim brought *him* up to date on his injuries.

According to Jim,

There was one major cut on his head that required 10 stitches. Another gash had resulted in 15 stitches. But don't

worry, the scars won't show. The surgeon guaranteed he was an expert at invisible stitches and besides they would all be covered by his hair when it grew back in.

What else, oh yes, a severe concussion, an ankle sprain. Nothing broken. And that huge goose egg on his forehead would go away in a day or so.

Everyone had been very worried because he'd been unconscious for so long, but the prognosis was excellent.

In fact, he could probably leave the hospital by the end of the following week.

* * *

Jim disposed of the remainders of their dinner in a trash can down the hall and then pulled his chair next to the bed.

Tell me all about her. He said.

The actor exhaled a sigh of relief.

So, Jim had been there! And he had seen her! It wasn't only a dream.

At last!

He wasn't crazy after all.
and . . .

If she was real, he could find her somewhere. Somehow!

She's real. He spoke the words aloud to Jim. She's real

and she was injured so she must be here in the hospital.or some other hospital. Find her for me. Please.

Please.

You know. You saw her! You know what we mean to each other! I have to find her!!

Jim gave him the bad news.

The actor was the only patient admitted to the hospital in the last 24 hours.

There were no other hospitals or clinics in the area. And he had already called hospitals north to Carmel and south to San Louis Obispo.

Jim was truly sorry. She wasn't here. She wasn't anywhere to be found.

She was badly injured. He insisted. *When did the ETs arrive? Call them, they'll know where they took her. Maybe they took her to San Francisco.—or L.A. or what about the airports? Maybe she had been flown . . .*

Those possibilities had been considered. Nothing.

He shut his eyes again. What now? he asked

Jim waited while his friend collected his thoughts. He repeated his earlier request.

Tell me about her. About the two of you.

He told Jim everything.

He began with New Years Eve. The night they met and fell in love. He described the day he saw her in his kitchen. October.

He told Jim how he felt. His doubts, his anger . . .

His love.

All of it.

It was a relief to finally tell the entire story to someone who understood how important she was to him.

What did Jim think about all this. Was she real? Or

Was it all a dream?

* * *

When his story was complete he lay exhausted and waited for Jim's comments.

Jim sat quietly for a long time.

He interrupted Jim's silence with a flurry of questions.

How had Jim known where they were? And where had he come from and where had he disappeared to after she'd been rescued and how did he find the house? . . . and . . .

It was Jim's turn to interrupt.

You told me an incredible story, Now be a little patient with me while I tell you an equally incredible story about last night. O.K.?

From his hospital bed, the actor nodded.

Jim began:

When the storm hit, Jim was in his room, at the compound, meditating. He'd heard the crash of the jeep colliding headfirst into the tree. and immediately ran from his cabin to see what had happened.

Jim said the smoke from the accident was visible through the rain and he joined others running down the hill.

They pried the door of the jeep open and lifted the unconscious driver out of the car and laid him down on the ground.

Blood was gushing from the deep cut on the driver's head.

Fortunately one of the other guests that weekend was a doctor. He applied emergency first aid while they brought around another jeep.

They rushed the driver to the hospital.

Jim described a seriously injured man being hurried into the emergency room in the middle of a freak storm.

The doctors, recognized their famous patient and went immediately to work.

Jim told him the doctors were very concerned because *he* wasn't responding to treatment; wasn't waking up.

They said they couldn't predict when or if their famous patient would ever wake up. He was in a deep coma A cat scan revealed a blood clot. They were considering the possibility of surgery . . .

Jim knew he was of no help in the emergency room, so he found a quiet corner in the hospital chapel and went into deep meditation, adding his own healing powers and prayers to those of the doctors.

He interrupted Jim.

He didn't have any memory of going to the hospital at all. He did remember the accident but he had clear memories of driving straight from the accident to the cliffs. How could he have forgotten going to the hospital.

Jim waited patiently while he figured it out for himself.

What exactly was Jim trying to tell him?

That none of it had really happened? That he'd hallucinated the entire incident while in a coma in the hospital? That couldn't be.

You saw her. You saw me rescue her. You called 911!

Jim responded.

No he didn't think the actor was crazy and no he didn't think he was hallucinating. But he, Jim had not called 911 either because,

Jim sighed.

. . . let me just finish the story Jim asked.

It was during his meditation that Jim had suddenly found himself out in the storm, standing at the cliff's edge.

Jim heard a scream for help and when he looked over the edge of the cliff he saw a woman hanging precariously from a small branch jutting out of the side of the cliff. He watched in horror as her grasp on the branch slipped and she fell helter skelter toward the ocean.

Jim was convinced he was going to be a reluctant witness to this strange woman's eerie death when she bounced off of a protruding rock and then crash landed onto a small ledge just above the water. Jim heard her scream in pain which at least let him know she was still alive.

Jim was about to rush off for help when he heard the sound of a vehicle racing across the fields. The engine stopped, a car door slammed. Jim watched the amazing apparition of the actor running toward him.

Racing across the field like a mad man.!!!

Jim had then beheld the incredible rescue of the woman on the cliffs by a man Jim knew for a fact was unconscious in an intensive care unit in a hospital, over 30 miles away.

Jim said he was there at the cliffs, watching as his new friend made the first rescue attempt and then Jim said, he was unexpectedly back in the chapel.

The nurse sought him out to tell him the patient still

had not regained consciousness but that his brain was responding to the medication and the doctors had high hopes they could dissolve the blood clot without surgery.

Jim paused in his tale; the pain in the Actor's head increased two fold.

Was it all been a dream then?

Jim reassured him,

It was a lot more than a dream. Look.

He opened the closet to reveal dried muddy clothes. The T-shirt belonged to Jim. The muddy and torn flannel shirt was the actors.

There's more. Jim said. He reached into the closet and handed him the remnant of a blanket. It was still tied onto a belt. Her belt.

Jim pointed out that the blanket did not come from the compound. Therefore, it could only be the one she'd had with her. The blanket she tied onto theirs.

He held the blanket. He passed it from hand to hand. Held it to his face. Breathed it in. Was that her perfume? Was this to become just another momento like the shirt he still kept near him at all times?

He laid back on the pillows and hugged the fragment to him.

He was quiet for a long time.

Then he asked Jim the million dollar question.

Was she real? Was she a ghost, a phantom, a spirit . . . or was she real?

Jim said there was one additional thing he wanted *him* to consider before they held that particular discussion. He indicated a large bandage wrapped securely around the actor's biceps.

You didn't have a cut on your arm when you were admitted to the hospital, Jim informed him. Outside of the head injuries there were no marks on you at all.

Yet, when they brought you back to this room there was a deep gash on your arm. There was the goose egg, and all the other injuries you see and feel. Including a twisted ankle. They can't explain how they came to be so *they*—the doctors-have decided that you did have all that damage when you arrived here.

You and I know better.

The mud hole. I cut myself on a piece of broken glass when I tripped. I remember it was bleeding and then I forgot all about it. And I wrenched my ankle when I fell too. This cut , he pointed to a small scab on his hand. I cut it on my belt buckle when I was tying the blanket on . and the bump on my head.

Jim smiled.

Ergo, there may have been a miracle, but not an hallucination.

Then she is real.

But, if she's real . . .
where did she go? What happened to her after we rescued her?

I don't know, Jim admitted. I wish I did.

Then we're back to square one. What is she? Is she real?

Jim hesitated before he answered. He'd been musing over this question long before it was asked. And he wanted to be sure he gave this tortured soul lying on the bed his very best answer.

As far as Jim was concerned it didn't matter if she was real or not. in the conventional sense of the word, he explained.

She was real enough for both of them to see her. For her life to be at risk! . . . For him to love her and for her to return that love.

The obvious fact was, Jim continued, that there existed between this man and this woman a love that transcended time and space.

A love so strong that wherever the one was, the other was too.

Out on those cliffs, Jim had witnessed a miracle. A miracle born of true love.

Jim was embarrassed by his own rhetoric. He grinned and shrugged his shoulders

When logic didn't work, when nothing fit the known then maybe the only good advice was the advice found in fairy tales.

Never give up.

Never stop loving her;

And remember that True Love always wins out in the fairy tales.

The prince finds Cinderella. Snow White wakes up *and they all live happily ever after.*

Jim continued.

Remember Brigadoon? The village only appears for one day every hundred years but Gene Kelley goes back to where it was because he has realized how much he loves Cyd Charisse and just when he's given up, the village reappears and there she is . . .

True love is all about miracles.

Trust the love, Jim said.

Believe in Miracles.

* * *

The actor confessed to Jim that he realized on his way to find her that he no longer had any other choice.

He no longer had the strength to deny what his heart

had always known to be true. That it did not matter if she was an illusion or real.

He would love her forever.

While she lay in his arms on the edge of the cliff, and he realized they had done it. She was safe. He made a vow to himself then and there that whether he ever saw her again or not, he would always love her and remain true to that love.

Jim applauded that vow.

So, was Jim telling him that she was or wasn't real?

To be honest with you, I don't know for sure.

However, In my opinion yes, she is real.

The two of you, have made a spiritual connection that has committed you to one another. Which is why I believe you have these encounters. You said you thought she was your destiny.

Maybe not. Maybe you were never supposed to meet, but you did. Maybe it was never intended that you share more than a brief moment in time. But your love for each other is stronger than your destiny. Your love won't listen to the forces that keep you apart.

Maybe that's why you continue to find each other.

We can change our destiny. If your love is strong enough."

They were both quiet for a long time while they considered Jim's words

Jim's words had brought back a half-memory. . . . a dream he'd had before he ever met her. A crazy dream about a Fairy Godmother; about wishes . . . and true love.

Now this was crazy. He was losing his mind.

Jim put up his hand to silence the actor. "Maybe not so crazy he said.

Just remember what I told you. Trust, Love and most of all Believe in Miracles.

What was Jim saying? That he should just sit back and *trust* she would come back to him in another dream? Was that it?

He couldn't just wait.

He didn't have time to just trust

And yes he did believe in miracles.

After last night how could he not. *But*

He couldn't just sit around and wait.

He had to do something.

Jim meant well enough but love, trust and miracles just didn't cut it!! It was all well and good for Jim to be esoteric about the situation. Jim, after all lived esoteria. But he had to be practical!

He wanted her. he needed her

He had to find her!

Jim corrected the fallacy in the actor's conclusions.

To the contrary, Jim believed in action. Of course he should look for her. If she was worth loving, she was worth fighting for, worth searching for.

In the meantime, while he was searching, while he was doing everything in his power to find her. He should remember to keep the faith.

Jim admonished him once again to consider Fairy tales.

The pampered prince who has all of the women in the kingdom chasing him, has to search for Cinderella. Fate presents him with true love. But he hasn't earned it. So fate gives him a taste and then takes her away until he makes the effort to prove his love.

In Sleeping Beauty the Prince has to not only fight through all the brambles but he has to defeat the dragon too.

He said he hadn't been aware of Jim's special literary talents.

Jim took the chiding in the light manner in which it was intended.

While you are searching, proving your love is worthy enough to win the fair princess.

Cinderella, he interrupted.
He was slightly embarrased to admit it.
I call her Cinderella.

They grinned at each other.

All the more reason. See, on some level you know.

So, don't forget the rest of it. Jim reminded.

Trust, Love, and Believe in Miracles!

He wondered aloud why doesn't the princess ever chase after the Prince.

Cinderella fought hard to help Prince Charming find her . . . You think you are the only one looking. I promise you, you are not. She is looking for you just as hard as you are for her. But in a different way

Jim, think about it. How hard can I be to find? Tour buses come by weekly.

Maybe it isn't as simple as just showing up on your doorstep for her. Maybe she has her own dragons to slay before she can find the happy ending.

Besides, can you imagine some girl showing up on a movie stars doorstep and announcing herself as Cinderella?

If she knows about me at all when she is awake. He said.

Jim found he had to agree with his friend on that one.

* * *

The search began in ernest the day he was released from the hospital—10 days later. They searched the area for some sign of her. They spent a week looking for the cliff where he'd rescued her, knowing the house where she was staying had to be near by.

Jim was more familiar with the area so he did the driving. North to Carmel, south to the Hearst Castle.

But they couldn't find her; ;they couldn't find the house.

They couldn't find any trace of her existence.

* * *

Jim hated to abandon the search but he was needed at home. They shook hands and said their good-byes knowing that in a short time span they had forged a friendship that would last forever.

Jim wished him luck and told him not to ever give up. Jim was confident that they would find each other. He said he would meditate on it. And they would stay in touch.

Jim reminded him, Any time he needed a friendly ear, he had the number.

* * *

He continued the search alone.

Before he conceded defeat, he made one last drive down the road from the compound and then turned first left and then right, following the road, looking for signs of a turn off. He couldn't remember how far he'd driven that night before cutting across the fields.

It didn't matter. There were fences everywhere, none of them broken.

* * *

He went back to Los Angeles without her.

And although he spent the entire flight inspecting Pacific Coast Highway for her red Z, he didn't see it.

* * *

When Claudia returned from New York, he was gone from the apartment in Beverly Hills.

The note he left said he was sorry, he still cared about her, Claudia, but something had happened and he was back at the beach house in Malibu. Under the circumstances, he said, it would not be fair to her to continue their relationship.

When Claudia drove out to the beach house and asked if she could stay with him he told her they couldn't have the same kind of relationship they'd shared. Everything had changed he said, without explaining what *everything* was.

Claudia said she didn't care about that. She just wanted to be near, to be a friend.

She sounded desperate and he didn't have the heart to turn her away. He remembered a time not that long ago when Claudia's being there had saved him. He couldn't turn his back on her now.

So,

She moved her clothes into the spare bedroom and prayed every night that he would come to his senses and

realize how much she loved him and what a wonderful life they could share if he would only return her love and stop dreaming about ghosts who slice oranges in kitchens.

By Thanksgiving they were once again living in both houses and to the outside world they were as close as ever.

Only they knew how much everything had changed.

He had begun pacing the beach at night all over again in a kind of restless fever.

He wouldn't talk about his trip to the Center. He wouldn't tell her about his injuries. But it was obvious how much his visit there had changed him.

Sometimes she saw him staring at the calendar,
at December 31st.

Claudia waited for New Years to be over, convinced that once they had survived New Years Eve, he would come to his senses and they could get on with their lives.

Her Story

IT was several days before she was ambulatory.

The leg wasn't broken after all.

Like the rest of her body, it was badly sprained, bruised and swollen. She had a huge bruise on her back from nape of neck to just below her hips and a lot of small cuts and abrasions on her face, arms and legs and hands from the smaller rocks and the falls.

She had a black eye she didn't remember getting at all and in general she looked like someone who had been through what she had been through.

She probably should have had stitches put in the slash across her cheek but she made do with a butterfly bandage and hoped there wouldn't be a scar.

She knew she should go to a doctor or called one to come to her. However, her phones were out for days after the

storm and, of course, in her desire to avoid Greg, she had left the cellular phone at home on her dresser in L.A. And of course with her leg in the splint the way it was, she couldn't even get into her car, let alone drive it anywhere.

She would have to make do with what was available.

She found an emergency medical kit in the bathroom and used its contents to clean and tend to her various wounds. Her nails looked horrible but she remembered from a past camping experience with her brothers that they would grow again and heal. The important thing was to avoid infections.

In the meantime, she created baby splints and soft pads to protect those injuries most likely to be re hurt in her everyday living.

The first couple of days she hobbled around the house like a 90 year old woman with crippling arthritis. She was afraid to remove the split from her leg and examine it too closely. But when she did, she discovered happily that it wasn't broken and all in all, it appeared she would survive her harrowing experience after all.

She spent her days in bed and taking hot baths. Pampering herself

And she relived that night on the cliffs.

It was insane! Where had he come from?

Could she have conjured him up in order to save herself.?

But if that were the case, where had the belt come from.

The belt she still had. The belt right now resting on her bed. The belt with his initials carved on the inner side.

And if it was some other person, not him, who had lifted her to safety then where had they gone?

* * *

She could still hear his words of love and promises of forever.

They echoed in her soul.

She relived every night they had spent together, beginning with New Years Eve.

She spent her days remembering.

At night she dreamed of him . . .
and in the morning, she cried and cried when she realized she was still alone.

If he loved her so much then why had he abandoned her in her time of need? Why did he save her life and then vanish like some road company Lone Ranger.

* * *

By the end of the week she was hard at work again, spending long hours on the computer.

And the week after that she was even brave enough to take small hobbling walks on the beach at low tide.

But mostly she stayed on the deck of the house and stared at the sea and wondered what she was going to do with rest of her life.

And over and over she asked herself why, if he was real, and if he truly loved her as he said, he didn't come back to the house to be with her, to make certain she was alive and well.

Was she just imagining the entire rescue? Maybe she'd fallen in the house and had a Dorothy type dream. Perhaps she had never left Kansas after all.

But that scenario was even more difficult to accept than the daring cliff rescue by a dream lover.

Given her choice of what to believe, she chose the latter. If she was having delusions then she would damn will pick the delusion she would believe in.

* * *

All too soon, it was time to go back to Los Angeles and face the present

She packed up her car and after one long last look around, she drove away.

* * *

She really wasn't sure what made her drive up into the foothills to the buildings she'd seen from her cottage.

There was no one there.

Yet she could feel his presence.

Instinctively, she walked toward the cabin he had stayed in that weekend.

The door to *his* cabin opened.

She held her breath.

And
a security guard exited the cabin.

Could he be of any assistance?

She asked for information about the compound.

He explained about the Center and told her it was closed until after the first of the year. He urged her to come back another time.

She nodded and drove off.

She headed for home.

His Story

HE hired private detectives to find her.

Someone must have treated her. She had a broken leg for godsakes!

He told them to check all the doctors in a 30 mile radius, then a 100 mile radius.

* * *

They were back with their report in a month.

They had spoken to every doctor, every clinic in the area. No one had treated a girl with a leg injury in the 48 hours after the storm.

No one recognized her description. Yes they had interviewed gas station attendants, mini market operators, you name it, they had interviewed them.

She didn't live in the area. She might have just been driving through.

He knew better.

He told them about the house.

He described it as he remembered it from his brief visit, and asked them to try all the local real estate agents.

* * *

Weeks later they returned again.

With nothing.

No news was not good news.

He told them to check the owners of all red 280Zs in California.

They asked him if he was certain the car had California plates and he confessed he wasn't.

They spoke to him in words best used in explaining things to a small child. They said that his so called mystery woman might not even own the 280Z, or if she did own it that she might have had it painted since she purchased it.

They described the 'California Stalker Law to him in detail as though he were a criminal instead of a man in love.

They told him to save his money.

They told him get a life!

They didn't understand.

She was his life!

* * *

The end of the year was coming all too soon.

Another New Years Eve.

* * *

Claudia watched him brooding in his office.

The new movie was stalled while the studio insisted on yet another re write and he was at loose ends. She tried to distract him but nothing seemed to work.

The calendar stood between them.

The calendar and a mystery woman who wasn't anywhere and yet was everywhere.

* * *

One night when he was particularly quiet and spending his time staring at the beach, she sat down on the floor at his feet and asked him to please tell her what had happened while she was in New York.

She told him she had a right to know what had made things change so much between them.

* * *

Of course she was right. She did deserve to know what had happened.

He took her by the hand and led her over to the sofa. They sat facing each other.

He continued to hold her hands in his while he told her about the trip to the center and the death defying rescue at the cliffs.

Claudia thought she might be sick.

Instead

She kissed him on the side of his mouth and said that she wanted to stay with him for as long as he needed her.

He told her he wasn't being fair to her. He was taking advantage of her.

She disagreed. He was helping her get on with her life. She repeated her promise to him that *if* the mysterious woman ever showed up, she Claudia, would be the first to wish them both the best.

Silently, she prayed that would never happen.

* * *

His telling her about the rescue brought them closer again.

She still wasn't invited back into his bed, but he quit shutting her out. He showed her the blanket and the muddy clothes. He told her about Jim and Jim's words of wisdom.

Through it all she managed to stay calm.
To be both sympathetic and supportive.

When all she really wanted to do was find his mystery woman and rip her heart out.

Privately both of them asked themselves the same question.

Was the destiny he was trying to alter Claudia?

It gave her hope.

* * *

When he confessed to Claudia that he'd hired a top detective agency and that the agency hadn't been able to find *her* either, Claudia felt hopeful for the first time in months.

Maybe she really was a ghost.

* * *

As for him:

He was back on the old emotional seesaw for days after his meeting with the detectives.

And then weeks later, while he was meditating, Jim's words came back to him.

Love was all that mattered Jim had said.
Trust the love. Believe in miracles.

He considered that.

Wasn't it, hadn't it all been a miracle so far anyway?

A beautiful woman appears out of nowhere and you share an intense evening of love and then she vanishes.

She pops in and out of your life unexpectedly in unusual places and under ever more unusual circumstances . . .

But when you are together there is all that love and never any doubts

Maybe what he should do is just go on with his life, secure that she loved him as much as he loved her, that she wanted to be with him too and that somehow they would find each other.

* * *

It was such a simple concept that, of course, he dismissed it at once.

But it kept coming back to him in the middle of the night.

She loves you he told himself. You will find each other;

Some way,
some how.

Hold on to that and try not to worry about the hows and ways.

Easier said than done.

But he clung to that belief.

It became his new mantra; his new life raft in a stormy sea.

* * *

New Years came and went.

He and Claudia went to several parties and it would be a lie if he said he didn't look for her.

He looked for her everywhere.

* * *

And he died a little inside when she wasn't to be found.

He tried not to despair.

If not this year, then next year, he promised himself.

Next year, he vowed, Next year we will spend New Years Eve together.

Her Story

SHE returned to Los Angeles.

She moved out of Greg's apartment and into her own.

* * *

She flirted briefly with the idea of moving to Malibu but quickly realized she could not handle being that close to him and yet not being with him.

And she still couldn't allow herself to believe that he would love her in person as much as he loved her in her dreams.

After all, he was still with Claudia, wasn't he.

* * *

Her new apartment had its own office, two bedrooms and a large living room with a view of all of LA from its perch in the Hollywood Hills.

The Realtor told her that on a sunny clear day she would be able to see Catalina in one direction and downtown in the other.

Having lived in LA for over five years, she decided not to hold her breath for that one.

And then, on the day she met with the Realtor at the apartment to tell her she had decided not to sign the lease, it suddenly stopped raining, the sun magically appeared and she and the Realtor watched in awe as the entire Los Angeles basin was spread out before her . . . all the way to Catalina (a blurry cloud looking island in the far distance) in one direction and downtown and it's island of mini sky-scrapers in the other.

A rainbow appeared to be arched over it all

She quickly signed the lease, bought new furniture, and moved in.

* * *

On Thanksgiving she went back east to Ohio to visit family and stayed until after Christmas.

She just wasn't sure what to do New Years Eve.

And then

She said to hell with it and she bought another new green dress and hit every party she'd been invited to. And then she dropped by every party Greg had been invited to (yes, she gave in and spent the evening with him).

It was an ironic twist of fate that although the two of them were invited to many of the same parties and that they both attended each and every one of them, they still managed to miss each other all evening.

Sometimes only by minutes.

As midnight neared, she told Greg she had a splitting migraine and insisted he drive her home.

She'd tried. she'd really tried to make it happen. But she couldn't go to another party he wouldn't be at.

NOT TONIGHT.

Maybe not ever.

Greg wanted to stay the night with her. He was still in love he said. Wouldn't she give them another chance.

She tried to be nice about it and when nice didn't work she asked him to leave in a tone sharper than she normally used. They each blamed her sharpness on the non-existent headache

At midnight she found herself alone in her apartment.

As the clock struck twelve and the band played Auld Lang Syne on her stereo, she broke down, and cried.

It just wasn't fair.

Worse, it was cruel.

If she was Cinderella; where was Prince Charming?

* * *

At two, she was still wide awake and pacing the floor.

On the radio in her bedroom, Elton John was singing about sad songs. About caring enough to write it down.

The line picked at her. Nagged at her.

Tried to tell her something important.

She pushed her thoughts away and took off her Cinderella finery.

She hung the new green dress in the closet next to the old green dress, which in turn hung next to last years green dress.

She had a sudden vision of herself in 10 years—her closet full of green dresses—all different and yet all the same. . . .

She walked around the apartment in an oversized T-shirt, leggings and a pair of heavy socks. She stared out the window at the city lights.

She poured herself a cup of coffee and then tossed it out. She turned on TV and turned it off.

She fed the cats, and watched "Sleepless in Seattle"—and cried like always. And then she punished herself even further by watching "An Affair to Remember"—and cried some more.

It was dawn by the time she crawled into bed and the cats snuggled up next to her.

The line from the Elton John song kept repeating itself, beating a tattoo in her brain as she slept and by morning she knew what she had to do if she entertained any hope of maintaining whatever was left of her sanity.

* * *

She poured a fresh diet coke over ice into a tall glass and took a drink She refilled the glass to the top, ambled into her office and sat down in front of her computer.

* * *

She stared at the blank screen.

The words seemed to come to her from someplace else.

Title page: Dream Lovers

Next page: What would you do if you had the chance to meet your soul mate . . .

The words flowed.

* * *

She knew if she was going to tell this story at all, she had to tell it from his perspective as well. And she had to ascribe the same yearnings and love to him during his waking hours that she felt during hers.

Okay, so maybe he didn't really share her dreams. Probably didn't share her dreams . . . and maybe he hadn't a clue as to who she was or even *if* she was. But this was her book, dammit, and in her book, they would share, on paper at least, what they might not ever share in real life.

Total Absolute Perfect Love

She took another sip of Diet Coke and closed her eyes.

Okay, she thought, take a deep breath and . . .

* * *

"His Story: she wrote.

"On New Years Eve a famous actor went to a party in Beverly Hills. He wore traditional black tie. He wandered around the room studying the other guests. . . .

The words flowed easily from her mind to her fingertips through the computer and onto the blue screen in front of her.

As she wrote, she felt closer to him than she had in months.

His Story

NEW YEARS EVE

HE somehow survived New Years Eve.

Barely.

CLAUDIA

CLAUDIA had tried to distract him all evening.

She'd been bright and cheery, sexy, romantic . . .

A host of characters, each designed to please and entertain.

Nothing had worked. She watched him at every party search the room for someone else's face.

She just managed to keep a smile on her own face for all to see.

She tolerated the congratulations from those who thought they were still together, gave polite excuses for dinner invitations she knew he would not attend, and during the long long night, watched him search endlessly for *her.*

She searched too. Scanning all the unfamiliar faces, wondering if this one or that one was the woman who would destroy everything she cared about.

Claudia might be his destiny but if she was, destiny was on the ropes.

At midnight he magically appeared by her side, the consummate good companion, and as the clock struck the hour, he kissed her lightly on the mouth.

Claudia refused to settle for so little. It had been a long tortuous night and she deserved better!

She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him into her. She kissed him long, hard and sensuously.

After a surprised moment he almost responded to her kiss and her heart sang with excitement.

then

He placed his hands on her shoulders and gently but firmly pushed her away. He kissed her on her forehead, sadly shook his head no and walked away from her.

* * *

He felt really bad for Claudia. He wasn't being fair. He didn't share his life or his bed with her anymore.

Not in any way.

She deserved better.

He had told her all this. Told her to run, get away!

And still she stayed.

How ironic life is, he thought.

It's a country song . . .

The one I love won't stay . . . and
The one I don't love won't go away.

* * *

And so, on that night of nights. . . .

On the anniversary of the Night that had changed his life forever, he lay awake in his otherwise empty bed with only memories of another New Years Eve to give him warmth.

He railed at the fates that would let him meet his true love and then take her away from him
over and over again.

* * *

NEW YEARS DAY

In the early morning he jogged up the fog shrouded beach and relived again that other morning so long ago.

And he made a resolution to himself. A New Years Resolution. Before this year ended, he would find her.

True, He didn't have a plan.

But he did have a determination!

Hard work and dedication was nothing new to him.

He had always been willing to work hard for what he wanted. To give it everything!

And he wanted one thing more than any other.

He wanted her. With every fiber of his being.

He wanted her!

* * *

Claudia had made plans to spend the day with a couple of girl friends. Fellow models, actresses and spokespersons. He was supposed to get together with several of his friends and watch the bowl games on TV.

When the time came for Claudia to leave, he kissed her good-by chastely and then called his friends and said he wasn't joining them after all. A few jokes were made about what must be the size of his non existent hang over. He hung up the phone and went for a long walk on the beach.

* * *

He sat on the rocks and watched the die hard surfers swimming out to catch the waves.

Memories of that first New Years Eve and the night they shared in October teased and taunted him.

After all this time, he could still smell her hair and remember the feel of her skin . . . Her laughter, the sound of her voice, the way she responded to his touch; his kiss. It was all as fresh in his mind as if it they had spent last night together.

* * *

When he'd had his fill of sand and sun, he went back into his house.

The house he had shared with her on far too few occasions . . .

He laid down on the sofa and clicked on the television. He muted the sound and gave himself over to his memories.

He relived the night they met.

Word for word.

Emotion for emotion.

Touch for touch.

He left nothing out.

None of the joy.

None of the love.

He listened to all of the music, danced every dance with her . . .

They walked once again in the moonlight . . .

At last he arrived at that moment when they lay in each others arms and once again he brushed her hair away from her face and kissed her.

That sweet soft kiss of the sated. Of the happy. . . .

He wanted to call out to those two images. To stop them from falling asleep . . .

If he had only stayed awake that night, she would still be with him today. He believed that.

He sat up on the sofa. His face was flushed.

He shouted at the Gods.

WHY?!
and then whispered in despair
why.?

He held his head in his hands and experienced the pain.

He loved her so much. So very very much . . .

Why? . . . Why . . . Why.

* * *

He walked through the house, searching for her.

Trying to bring her to him once again . . .

She eluded him.

He laid down on his bed and was taken over by visions of that first night.

He re lived it all. Again . . . and again . . .

And this time
for the first time.

He took comfort from those memories.

They gave him strength.

Her Story

WEEKS went by.

The cats walked across her keyboard to remind her to feed them.

Her friends took to ordering food in to remind her to feed herself.

And when she wasn't writing, she was reading the story to her friends.

It was both strange and wonderful to finally be able to share her love for him with others.

At last

Even if they didn't know the *real* truth.

She did.

* * *

As an added bonus, ever since she'd started writing the book, she'd had the feeling that she was somehow connected to him.

Sitting inside his head.

Hearing his thoughts, feeling his emotions . . . sharing his memories.

There were times when she actually could almost. . . . maybe . . . allow herself to believe that he *really* did feel about her the way She felt about Him.

To remind herself how impossible that was. she kept a copy of one of the major magazines on her coffee table for just such occasions when she needed a hefty reminder that he didn't know who she was really; didn't love her really.

Claudia was on the cover of that magazine.

Claudia with her glorious mane of models hair and that big smile and those long luxurious eyelashes someone undoubtedly airbrushed but nonetheless were probably still incredibly long and thick.

Truth was she was beautiful. And famous and, as the article inside, reminded her, living with that handsome, star of films . . . and on and on.

And if that wasn't enough, accompanying the article was a photo of the two of them at the premiere of one of his films, his arm around her, smiling at her, oh so attentively . . . The accompanying article spoke about their meeting and called it *destiny.*

Maybe his character in the book loved her even when he was awake. Maybe the character thought about her as much as she thought about him . . . but that was fiction.

Part of her fantasy.

Claudia was the reality. Claudia was his destiny

His Story

WHEN his publicist called to ask him about the Charlie Rose show, it was just a formality. Doris had worked for him long enough to know he didn't much care for interviews and while he did them now and then, it was generally only to publicize a film when it first came out.

He was not to be seen chatting casually with Leno or Letterman. Oprah had never enjoyed the pleasure of his company. Rosie never got the opportunity to snap one of her rubber bands at his handsome face.

He didn't have a new movie coming out for months and while he personally liked Charlie Rose, he turned down a request to be on the show at least twice a year.

Charlie talked about politics.

While he had strong political opinions, he didn't discuss politics.

Charlie talked about religion.

He didn't discuss religion.

More important, Charlie talked about his guests personal lives . . .

He definately did not talk about his personal life.

So, Doris had already framed her polite regrets to Charlie Rose's producer when

He told Doris he'd be happy to do the Rose show. if they could do it right away.

As soon as Doris recovered from the shock, she called Charlie and gave him the good news.

Charlie was pleasantly stunned at this sudden coup. He played musical chairs with his line up and they agreed to do the interview the following Sunday night. They cranked up the publicity department immediately and got the word out.

For him it was a calculated gamble. Maybe she would be watching. Maybe he could give her a clue without coming right out and making a plea to her. Maybe he could *somehow* let her know how he felt.

Maybe the connection between them would be strong enough she would be able to read between the lines and understand what he was truly saying.

Maybe.

It was worth a try.

Her Story

ONE night she took a break from writing and turned on television.

Okay, the truth was, she heard he was going to be on the Charlie Rose show and she took the break to watch *him*.

The program opened, Charlie introduced him, the camera angle changed and. . . .

There he was.

He took her breath away.

She had lived so long with him inside her heart, afraid to see him in anything other than a film and now there he was. In the same room with her.

More or less.

He had been so real in her head for so long that sometimes she had forgotten that he was *real.*

With real opinions and a real sense of humor and real compassion and

Real.

My God, he was so incredible! And so warm. And funny and smart and . . .

She laughed at his humor; agreed with his philosophy. And—for a minute—when he was looking straight into the camera and talking about relationships and love, she had the eerie feeling he was speaking directly to her.

About them!. *Them.* As in *him and her.*

And then Charlie asked about Claudia and reality shattered her illusions.

She could not bear to listen to him further extoll the many virtues of St. Claudia. Not tonight.

She clicked off the television and went back to her preferred notion of reality. The book.

And thereby missed the part of the interview that would have altered her life forever.

* * *

His Story

He didn't know what he expected to happen after the Charlie Rose interview aired.

He supposed he'd fantasized that she would see the show, read between the lines of the things he'd said and call him.

Maybe he hadn't made the lines easy enough to read between.

Maybe she didn't see the show. Or if she saw the show, maybe she was in love with someone else. . . . *or*

He was playing Monday morning quarter-back and still losing the game.

He hadn't been clear enough. He'd tried to be too subtle. Too clever.

He should just have come right out and said he was looking for someone. . . . For her. Why couldn't he just say he was looking for her!

Oh sure, how about holding up a sign:

Cinderella, call this number; your prince is waiting.

He'd told Charlie Rose about the magic of love; about the fact that every man when he falls in love falls in love with Cinderella. And he'd even said a little more.

Oh, god, what if she thought Claudia was Cinderella!

He'd done it all wrong.

It was too late.

His one great chance and he'd totally blown it!

He thought of a dozen things he could have done differently; Said differently. Better ways to let her know.

He could have told Charlie about meeting a girl once. The opportunity was there . . .

Why hadn't he taken it. Why had he been so clever in his choice of words, thinking she would be able to read between the lines and know.

What on earth had he been thinking?

He'd gone on an interview show, something he didn't do. He talked about his personal life and love something he never did.

Couldn't she take the hint?

Couldn't he? Since he had done all that anyway, why couldn't he go all the way and come right out and say something.direct.

Logically he knew that any such action on his part would have resulted in women camping on his doorstep.

Along with the press.

Everyone but her.

He held his head in his hands.

He'd done it all wrong!

No second chance and he'd done it all wrong!

Her Story

HER friends *loved* the story!

She fell into the habit of writing all day and then, in the evening, she would read the latest segment, hot off the computer, to her three closest friends. Two in Los Angeles and one back home in Ohio.

On the day she wrote about the book store, they were all livid with her!

What on earth are you doing?!!! Are you crazy? How could you have her run away like that! All she had to do was just stand there and let him find her!!

Why didn't she do it?

How could she not take the chance?

She didn't know.

It was a question she had asked herself every day for weeks after the original incident.

She hadn't known then . . . and she didn't know now.

In theory, she agreed with her friends.

What kind of a hopeless dunce would summarily toss the chance of a lifetime out the window!?

Her. That's who.

But why?? Why, why, why. . . . ?

Because! That's why.

Because she was more afraid of having him see her and reject her or give her no reaction at all then she had been of anything else.

Her friends didn't understand.

That part about him wanting so bad to find her. . . .

That was all made up.

All in her head . . .

The bitter truth was, outside of her dreams, she didn't know anything!

And . . .

She was afraid to take a chance. Afraid of. . . . no, terrified of the possible rejection.

Better to have her dreams than nothing at all. . . .

She was a coward. She knew that. She accepted that.

She had tons of confidence when it came to her writing. And practically none when it came to her personal life.

All the more reason to hide behind a pen.

Or in a dream

His Story

HE felt as though someone was walking through his memories and reading his private diary.

Someone was unearthing his most private thoughts.

Not quite true.

They were only unearthing his thoughts about *her*.

There were times when he felt so close to her, he could smell her perfume, hear her laugh, and spin around expecting to see her.

She was never there.

Except . . .

Once, just before waking, he dreamed he was in a room and there she was.

She was sitting at a computer, writing.

She smiled up at him.

She asked him where he kept his journal. He explained he didn't keep one at all.

And then she'd smiled again and pressed her lips against his forehead.
and

His memories came pouring out of him, through her and into the computer.

At first he panicked.

No! She would drain him of all he held of her.

But then he realized that she wasn't taking his memories away from him.

He was sharing his memories with her.

The good ones.

The painful ones.

It brought them close again.

For the first time, they weren't *his* memories;

They weren't *her* memories.

They were their memories.

He began to think of his of the times he had shared with her as memories, instead of fantasies he didn't understand. but, oh, my God, how he ached for a new dream. Anything to see her again.

To hold her again.

* * *

But all he had of her was the past.

And how real was that?

Her Story

AS long as she was writing she could feel his presence sitting next to her. Reading the words, smiling at the memories.

Sharing it all—all over again.

He told her she had nothing to fear.

He told her he loved her

She should come to him. Reveal herself.

Where once these flights of fantasy would have caused her great alarm, now she put them down on paper.

She told his story and her story. She didn't use names. And there wasn't any dialogue.

It was a different way to tell a story.

But then it was a very different story she was telling, wasn't it.

* * *

Her friends couldn't get enough.

They called her every day and asked her to read to them.

The wonder of it all!

Yesterday she was a crazy writer in love with an imaginary lover.

Today she was a brilliant writer, writing, her friends claimed, the most romantic story they had ever read!

* * *

And then,

All too soon,

The story ended.

* * *

She sat back in her chair and sighed. She was going to miss him. Miss the closeness of the last months.

That evening she told them all she'd finished the book.

First she told Beth.

Beth.

The friend who had told her so long ago to stop the fantasy and move in with Greg.

Beth said no, it couldn't be the end. Not so soon. Beth wasn't ready for an end yet.

None of them were.

She reminded them that all stories end. Didn't they want the boy to get the girl and for everyone to live happily ever after?.

Well. . . . Maybe . . . since she put it that way . . .

But really what they wanted was more.

Just more. For it to continue.

Joan, the friend from Ohio suggested just write a new chapter every day.

Forever.

They didn't want the fantasy to end.

Neither did she.

* * *

She read the final chapter to Beth first.

And then bravely asked for a non-objective opinion.

She needn't have worried.

Beth loved the intensity The passion! The never knowing for sure what was real and what wasn't . . .

And then, Beth looked deep into her friend's green eyes.

Oh, my God. It was all real . . . Wasn't it.
Oh, I am so sorry. So very very sorry.

Find him.

I was wrong. I was an idiot! I didn't know . . . Tell him . . . He loves you.

Can't you see that. Don't you understand?

He'll know you. Just like you know him!

She hated to bust such a romantic bubble. but she had to remind her friend that the only reason Beth was so sure he loved her is that *she* put those words in his mouth.

Beth disagreed. She knew the *entire* story was true. *His* Story as well as *Hers*.

Believe in the love, she told her friend.

Believe in the love!!

She wanted to.

She really wanted to.
did she dare?

* * *

She missed him so much.

She needed to see him again. Now

Even if it was only for a moment . . .

His Story

It was one of those nights.

He'd been restless all day.

Thinking about her.

Looking for her.

Finding her nowhere and yet *feeling her everywhere.*

* * *

They were sitting in the study. He and Claudia.

Claudia was telling him about a new film offer she'd received when he abruptly excused himself and walked out the door to the beach.

Claudia remained in her chair in stunned silence for half a minute after he'd gone and then ran to the windows

facing the water and looked out, fully expecting to see them together; locked in each others arms.

The night fog blanketed the beach. Claudia had trouble locating him.

There he was.

Walking down the beach alone, hands thrust deep into the pockets of his sweats. His head down.

He vanished into the fog.

Claudia sighed and went into her bathroom to take a shower. She refused to let herself become paranoid over this.

If she had only continued looking out the window for another minute or two, and if the fog had not been so thick, Claudia would have seen what few others had ever seen.

Her Story

SHE was deep in thought.

Walking at the water's edge, skirting the foamy surf, invisible in the fog.

* * *

They didn't see each other.

They literally bumped into each other's arms.
and

Even in the dark night, in the middle of a dense fog. she knew immediately whose arms she was in!

At last. She was home.

His Story

HE collided with a shadowy figure.

And he knew immediately who it was!

Their arms held each other close.

Their kisses were hungry. They were demanding, sad, wistful.

They were a love song written for the ages.

* * *

He told her how much he missed her.

He asked about her leg and other wounds from the cliff experience.

And then

He kissed her again and again before she could answer his questions.

They caressed each other's faces, memorizing each smile.

Brushing away the tears.

Breathing in the very essence of each other.

His hands gently caressed her face. His fingers wove themselves in her hair.

And he kissed her and kissed her and kissed her and held her so near they were one.

And then.

All at once

He felt her begin to evaporate in his arms.

Her body didn't feel solid to him anymore.

He held her closer

TIGHTER.

He kissed her harder;—longer.

He willed her to stay with him. Demanded it.

* * *

It was like trying to hold on to the very mist that swirled about them.

I love you.

He whispered the words to her.

And, as she began to fade in front of him, he shouted the words to her . . .

I love you!! I'll find you!

I promise I'll find you!
and then

She was gone!

Her Story

IT had happened again!

One minute they were in each other's arms and he was kissing her and the next minute she couldn't find anything to hold on to.

He was there. They were together.

He shouted something to her. . . .
and then

He was gone.

* * *

She re read 'Dream Lovers'.

For the million and tenth time, she wondered if he would ever recognize her if he saw her in person.

Or if he would even care.

She started the story again from the beginning.

Beth and the others were right. She didn't want to end the book either.

She couldn't bear for the fantasy to end.

She hugged the manuscript to her chest.

On paper she knew exactly how he felt.

His Story

HE took his time walking back to the house.

He could still feel the sensation of her in his arms. He could still taste the salt from her tears.

Who was she ?

Where did she keep disappearing to?

And most important of all

Why did she keep disappearing?

He'd sworn to himself he would ask her that question the next time they were together, but he didn't get the chance. She evaporated in front of him before he could even ask.

He wondered if she would have the answer if he did ask her.

He sighed and walked back into the house.

Claudia was asleep on the sofa. He covered her with a blanket and went to bed.

His own sleep was dreamless.

Her Story

SHE spent the next month writing and rewriting.

She didn't make that many changes.

A word here; a word there.

She enjoyed reliving it all.

Putting it down on paper where she could read about it made it more and less real.

Every time she sat down and worked on the story she felt as though he was in the room with her. Talking to her.

She imagined him kissing her on her neck in that place only he knew. His breath was in her hair.
and

She could smell the way he smelled right after a shower.

She sighed and hugged herself; imagining it was his arms around her . . .

And then she returned to the book.

* * *

It was her own opinion that she had been more than kind to Claudia.

She called her Cyndie in the book and made her a famous model turned actress, and a very nice person. Even though Claudia was a famous model turned actress, she didn't think Claudia would read the book and say, wow, that's me.

* * *

The more she thought about it the more she knew she needed a better ending.

Something more powerful, dynamic,

More passionate

How would they get together after all those intense moments?

What would be dramatic enough.

He couldn't just bump into her one day . . .

No, it had to be a lot better than that.

More climatic!

She wrote and then she wrote still more. Writing; rewriting. polishing . . .

* * *

And then the book was really finished.

And it felt as though she were losing him all over again.

* * *

Writing the book had given her the illusion of control.

She could almost make herself believe it was true when he told her over and over again how much he loved her.

His Story

HE missed her beyond all understanding.

After weeks of sharing his dreams and his memories of dreams with her, she had vanished even from them.

* * *

Claudia was packing to leave for New York again.

She didn't want to leave him alone. She still had nightmares about what had happened the last time she'd gone to New York

On the other hand, he had become so distant; so wrapped in his own thoughts, that she wasn't sure she wanted to stay either.

He needed a project to become involved in. A new film.

Or maybe a vacation.

She invited him to come to New York with her for a few days and said they could make a run for the islands. They both needed a vacation. They had been working way to hard. She tried to lure him with visions of white sand beaches and warm water.

Romance, white sand, moonlight. She painted a word picture to entice him.

But he wouldn't go.

Too much to do he said.

He had nothing to do.

Except think about *her.*

Claudia kissed him good-by and wondered if she would still be welcome there when she returned.

* * *

With Claudia gone, he wandered the house, even more restless, and edgy than before.

Something was happening.

Something that would forever alter his life.

He didn't know what it would be.

He was afraid to hope for what he wanted it to be.

Most of all

He was anxious for it to begin!

Her Story

SHE didn't want to give the book to her agent to send out for her.

She wasn't sure she wanted to give the book to *anyone* or even that she wanted it published at all. After all, publishing hadn't been the purpose behind writing it.

She wrote it as a catharsis. A means of survival.

On the other hand, she was a professional writer and this was such a magic story that she felt everyone would relate to it.

God knew all her friends were crazy about the book. They had been trying to talk her into selling them copies straight off the printer.

So, she copied the book, wrote a cover letter and sent it off.

* * *

The first publisher politely turned it down. They said it wasn't quite mainstream enough for them.

Okay. That happens.

The second publisher sent a form letter.

That hurt

She re read the book.

It was good!

A little unorthodox in style sure, but good!

She put it away for a couple of week while she completed a script that was due. And then she read it again.

* * *

By the time she finished the last page she was smiling.

Yes, in its present form the book was good.
and. . . .

She knew how to make it great!

* * *

New title:

Once Upon a Time
A Modern Fairy Tale

At first . . .

She only changed a few words here and there;—nothing major.

Then she went through it one more time. More changes.

Not in the story itself, but. in her description of the story Fine tuning. she called it.

Then she topped it all off by adding an introduction and a *killer* new ending.

In retrospect, maybe the other ending had been too ambiguous.

So:

Introduction:

Once Upon A Time, in a magic kingdom by the sea, called California, two people who didn't know each other. . . .

As for the new ending . . .

It was unbearable to think of an ending where they didn't get together at the end. She could never handle that kind of an ending.

It would have been far too much like real life

She wondered what would happen if they had a meeting at a posh restaurant like maybe Drai's or Jimmy's.

Why would they meet?

That one was relatively easy. The "She" in her book sold a script for an important film and the producers wanted to hire *Him*. The meeting would be arranged at Jimmy's to discuss the project.

And so they would finally come face to face at that meeting, each terrified that the other wouldn't recognize him/her.

Of course he would 'know' her from the script they sent him.

Somehow he would just know.

* * *

She wrote of a tension filled dinner meeting with the Director (still in love with her, of course), the Producer (who loved only money and hit movies—not necessarily in that order), her agent, Seymour, His agent, 'Him' and, of course, Moi.

She would be late.

He would be later.

Neither would know what to say; how to act.

She would wear a green dress.

A green dress with matching jacket.

She typed furiously into the wee hours of the morning, describing a pressure filled evening.

She dropped her pen; he handed her his.

Their hands touched . . .

Their eyes met. . . .

In the middle of the meeting she would take off the business jacket revealing a sexy pencil slim dress with tiny straps going over beautiful pale shoulders with sexy lacing in the back.

When she removed the jacket and turned to drape it over the back of her chair, his breath caught; his heart stopped, and it took all of his self control to not reach out and take her in his arms right then and there.

They would both put on a cool exterior and each would silently wonder if the other recognized them.

They would both be filled with anxiety . . .
and love
and fear of loss.

And in the end just when it looked as though the dinner was going to break up and they would go their separate ways once more.Still not acknowledging their love . . .

He would interrupt the conversation to say there was just one more thing he needed to know . . .

Everyone would stop and stare at him, including her.

Everyone would wonder if he was turning down the film, including her.

And then he would hold out his hand to her and he would say,

May I have this dance.

In the restaurant where there was no dance floor, no orchestra.—He would ask her to dance.

No one would know what to do or say— including her.

He would take her hand in his, and she would somehow find the courage to go with him.

The others would stare after them as he took her into his arms and they began to dance to music only they could hear.

In his arms, the magic between them would happen all over again. They would glide across the floor as on that New Years Eve of long ago.

And then,

He would call her his own Cinderella . . . and they would kiss not in a dream, and she would finally know that his love for her was as real as her love for him.

They would leave the restaurant together and . . . just like a fairy tale, they would

Live happily ever after

* * *

The pages were charged with emotional electricity.

When she was finally finished with the last comma—the last period, she sat down and had a long- long cry.

His Story

THE feeling of something *big* about to happen continued. But nothing did happen.

Nothing at all.

Claudia returned from New York and life, such as it was, went on.

* * *

And then . . .

He was supposed to go to Paris to promote a film and accept an award.

Claudia asked to go with him. She said she needed to go there for a magazine layout anyway and besides she knew how much he hated making travel arrangements.

He said, no that was fine, he could manage, thank you.

Claudia persuaded him with logic. They both had to be in Paris at the same time, he needed an escort for the awards dinner . . . why not her?

Eventually, of course, he relented. When she played the guilt card, he gavé in.

Fact was, he was consumed with guilt over Claudia. Part of him was certain she would be better off if he made a clean break; and the rest of him listened to her pleas that she be allowed to stay with him.

He felt guilty because he didn't love her. He felt guilty that he wanted her to leave and more guilty because he let her stay.

He told himself that surely she must understand how he felt but he was too honest to believe that, which only added to the guilt and kept him from asking her to leave.

The endless circle.

As for Claudia:

She was tempted to reserve a suite with only one bedroom. She could claim the hotel had made an error. A part of her still insisted on believing that if she could just once get him to make love with her again, he would forget *her.*

She reserved a two bedroom suite.

* * *

They were met at the airport by the producer of the award event and whisked to the hotel in a stretch limo designed to impress any Hollywood mogul.

At the hotel they stopped only long enough to drop Claudia and the luggage off and then rushed to the theater where the awards would be taking place and rehearsals.

Claudia stayed at the hotel just long enough to inspect their rooms and drop off the luggage.

Then

She went shopping.

She thought a new and exciting wardrobe might get his attention.

* * *

She bought a long provocative skirt with a slit that went up forever, a top that was barely there, an extremely sexy negligée', a bathing suit that enhanced and showed off her legendary body, and an evening gown for the awards ceremony designed to make grown men beg.

* * *

He didn't even notice.

Here he was in the most romantic city in the world with a woman hundreds of thousands of men lusted after.

And what did he do?

He walked the boulevards alone.

He searched for *her* face among all the other faces.

It defied logic.

But he did it anyway.

Her Story

HER agent, Seymour, got her a lot of money for her most recent script.

The producers hired Mel Gibson and went into production.

She was going to be a super star.

Or so Seymour told her.

She was happy to have the big check. And even happier to envision her name on a movie starring a *real star* of the magnitude of Mel Gibson.

She'd heard he was a lot of fun to work with too. Demanding but fun.

It was all very exciting.

* * *

But right now all her attention was focused on polishing her 'baby'.

She'd finally allowed Seymour to read her script and he was convinced that the script would win her an academy award.

And that thought was more thrilling than any amount of money! or even Mel Gibson.

* * *

She read in the Hollywood Reporter that *he* was in Europe, promoting a film.

Naturally, Claudia was with him.
some things never changed.

His Story

APRIL in Paris had been a bust so far.

Once he thought he'd seen her strolling down a small side street.

He chased after her but she'd turned a corner and vanished.

He asked himself a thousand times why he was looking for her here of all places. If he couldn't find her in California, why on earth did he think he would find her in Paris?

Because.

Because Paris is the city of love.

Because she is my love.

My own true love.

* * *

And then one drizzly night he decided to take a late walk from his hotel to the Eiffel Tower.

N0, that wasn't quite accurate.

In truth, one drizzly night he *had* an irresistible need to go to the Eiffel Tower.

He didn't know why, but he trusted his instincts and made the trip in record time.

Her Story

IT was a wet April in Los Angeles too.

Eight hours behind Paris—two o'clock in the afternoon to his ten o'clock at night.

She sat on her balcony and watched the drizzle.

The day matched her mood entirely.

And yet. . . .

And yet, there was something . . .

She leaned back and closed her eyes

There was a subtle shift in the energy around her. Something different in the air . . .

Her eyes remained shut . . .

and when she opened them again

the tableau in front of her had changed. She was still on a balcony, but it wasn't her balcony.

It wasn't daylight

And it wasn't Los Angeles.

She peered through the night mists of Paris.

She could just barely make out the blurred image of the Eiffel Tower.

Get a grip, she told herself. Be logical.

She couldn't be in Paris.

She was home in Los Angeles.

And yet. . . .

She took the elevator down to a lobby and ran out the door to the street.

She kept staring up at the Eiffel Tower. She had to get there. Had to get there before . . .

Oh, God.

She felt like Deborah Kerr and Meg Ryan running for the Empire State Building!

* * *

He would be there. Waiting for her. Why else would this wonderful madness be taking place.

He would be there.

She knew it! She could feel it!. . . .

And this time, she would be brave enough to ask him about Claudia.

* * *

She ran off the elevator at the top of the structure and into his waiting arms.

I knew you would come, he said.

* * *

And then she was in his arms and
there was no further need for words.

His Story

SHE dashed off the elevator right into his arms.

They held each other.

They didn't want to ever let go of each other.

* * *

Eventually, they'd walked around the observation deck, arms intertwined. They even managed to stop kissing long enough for him to show her the view.

It was her first time in Paris.

At the foot of the Eiffel Tower, he bought her a small bouquet of violets from an old woman. The old woman gave them her blessing and they gazed at each other with unconcealed love.

They were typical lovers in the *City of love.*

They walked the streets together,

Drank café lattes at a sidewalk café,

Danced to blues music in a smoky club.
and then. . . .

They found a charming small hotel.

And spent the night making love.

* * *

He told her how much he loved her.

He promised her that somehow . . . somewhere . . . against all odds, he would find her.

They would be together.

He asked her to believe in him.

To believe in their love.

To trust the future.

* * *

She wanted to ask him about Claudia but she didn't want to spoil their time together so she held him to her.

She kissed his face; his mouth.

She loved him and made love to him.

And she lied and told him she believed him when he said they would be together.

* * *

They tried to stay awake.

He knew as well as she what would happen when they fell asleep.

* * *

But try as they may, they couldn't stop the inevitable. And finally they fell asleep in each other's arms just as the Paris sky turned a grayish pink.

* * *

Believe in love, Jim had told him.

Believe in love.

And he had.

And she had come to him in Paris.

She would come to him again.

And one day, soon, she would stay for more than just a kiss; just a night.

He believed that now.

With all his heart.

And until that wonderful day,
they would always have Paris.

Her Story

WHAT was it Bogie said?

We'll always have Paris!

Well, She could do Bogie one better than that.

She not only had the memories of Paris still fresh in her mind, but in her refrigerator was a bouquet of violets, just starting to turn brown at the edges.

* * *

And then it was May.

She drove to Seymour's office on one of those glorious days in California that the Realtors all love to brag about.

Bright. Clear, cool and beautiful.

She rode the elevator up to the 34th floor where Seymour's palatial offices took up the entire floor.

Seymour greeted her effusively when she walked in the door. He took the 'baby' from her hands and escorted her into his private domain.

Seymour's office was legendary. It would have dwarfed John Wayne. There were jokes told about how long it took to get from the door to his desk.

A gossip columnist once claimed Seymour's office was in three area codes.

Seymour's secretary, Carol, walked in and handed her a large frosted glass filled with iced Diet Coke. She handed her boss a small bottle of Evian. Then she left.

And Seymour immediately started talking.

Why hadn't she told him about the book she had written? Wasn't he her agent after all? Was she thinking of making some changes and hadn't gotten around to telling him yet?

She quickly explained that it was a personal thing she'd written and that it probably wouldn't even come to anything and she didn't want to bother him with it and besides,

h*ow did he know about it?*

HA! he said. Fortunately for her, the editor of the publishing company knew he was her agent and had contacted him or she would have gotten bumpkis on this deal.

As it was, with his hard nosed negotiations, there was a nice advance. Nothing to sneeze at, he assured her.

With that he handed her a check with more zeros on it than she had ever seen before in her entire life!

She was amazed.

Seymour was gleeful at her shocked expression.

She told him he was amazing! The best agent ever.

She had done the hard part, he said. Writing such a great romantic novel that they were rushing it to print already.

It was going to be a Book Club event and would be on the best seller list. They already had movie offers, but he recommended holding out on those for more money.

Seymour continued to rave about her future.

She was going to be a *major star* in the firmament he told her.

Everyone in America was going to read this book and want to know if it was true.

She nearly dropped her glass.

EVERYONE?!

Oh, my God. Everyone?!

EVEN HIM?

What on earth had she been thinking?

Until now he had no way of knowing who she was so she didn't have to face the fear of rejection. But now . . .

Now she would always wonder if he had read the book and either didn't know it was about them

OR
did know and wasn't interested . . .

She wanted to scream out to Seymour to return the check and cancel the sale.

She was not ready for this.

Her heart thundered in her ears.

* * *

When at last she was able to breath normally again, she tried to focus in on Seymour's words.

Of course now he would make another historic deal for her on this most magnificent script she had written.

Seymour hugged her and sent her out the door, telling her to

Go, write and make more miracles!

And then she was back in her car, driving home.

* * *

That night she sat on the big bed in her bedroom holding one cat and petting the other, staring ahead, wondering what on earth she had done.

And where it would all lead?

His Story

IN June he left for Pennsylvania to make a movie.

Claudia

Claudia was working on a film in Vermont, not that far from her parent's home. It was an opportunity for her to visit. The director even gave her mother and father small parts in the film. They were thrilled.

Her parents were full of gossip courtesy of Entertainment Tonight. They were excited over the thought that Claudia was going to be marrying him.

He was such a delightful young man they said. And would he come to visit while she was at home?

Claudia left them to their illusions. It wouldn't have done any good to burden them with her confusion.

Besides, lately she thought they were going to make it after all.

He wasn't quite so distant lately.

Going to Paris had been the right thing to do. He had mellowed since Paris. He seemed happier.

Less angry.

More content.

Yes, she was certain everything was going to be just fine.

She would finish her film and then go back to the beach house and wait for him there.

She had a feeling about fall.

Life would be better then.

* * *

As for him. . . .

He tried to bring *her* to Pennsylvania.

He prayed. He meditated.

He begged the Gods that be. He did everything he could think of.

But she didn't come to him.

There was a time that would have crushed him. Given him all kinds of doubts about the future.

But this time it did not.
instead

He remembered Paris.

And Christmas Eve.

And the night on the beach . . .
and he believed

He believed in her.

He believed in himself.

But most of all . . .

He believed in them!

* * *

He had a feeling about fall.

He would find her then.

Her Story

SEYMOUR told her she should spend some of the money she was earning.

He found her a house in Malibu and insisted she buy it.

So she did.

And spent a lot more of her money remodeling it.

She turned it into a three and a half story loft/house/theater.

Very unusual. Very clever.

Everyone said.

The renovations were completed by Labor Day weekend so she threw a huge party to celebrate.

Her parents and brothers came out to visit.

Her friends were all there.

And many of her new neighbors dropped by.

* * *

He didn't come.

He was a half mile up the beach.

And a life time away.

His Story

THEY wrapped the movie just before the Labor Day Weekend.

Claudia flew into New York and they went to the Hamptons to visit friends.

Claudia was full of gossip from L.A.

Somebody was rebuilding a house down the beach.

There were rumors about a hot new script around town that had more security around it than a Woody Allen project.

* * *

The Hamptons were predictably boring. A clam bake on the water's edge. Fireworks.

He slept a lot. Walked the beach a lot. But he didn't dream. At least he didn't remember dreaming.

And he walked around the area looking for one face.

* * *

Labor day was the official end of summer and therefore the official beginning of fall.

He could hardly wait!

Her Story

AND then

Everything Happened At Once!!!

She went from being an up and coming writer whose name was definitely not on anyone's lips to

SUPERSTAR

In one 24 hour period.

* * *

The book was released on September 10th and was an instant bestseller!!

Number 1 on the New York Times Bestseller list.

Number 1 on the Book of the Month Club list.

Number 1 here
and

Number 1 everywhere else.

Oprah talked about it.

Oprah said she no sooner finished reading it than she read it again. . . . and then *all over again*

Katie Curic said she cried.

Barbara Strisand tried to option the movie rights.

So did Steven Spielberg.

So did a lot of others.
and that was only part of it.

On the same day the book came out, Seymour called to tell her the script was a

HOT HOT PROPERTY
and everyone wanted to read it.

And, incidentally, he added,, just so she would know he was doing his job, Seymour said, the check for the screenplay had more zeros on it than the one for the book advance.

Plus she had points too!

* * *

Entertainment Tonight wanted to interview her.

She said no.

Vanity Fair wanted her for the cover.

She said no.

Oprah called.

Oprah suggested a show around the book. Interview her first and then bring some Dream Lovers together.

She was all for that.

In Theory

Nightline called.

Extra called.

Diane Sawyer called.

Dateline called.

Rosie O'Donnell called.

60 Minutes called

She said No.

* * *

It wasn't easy saying no.

She respected Diane.

She loved Rosie

And she'd dreamed of Oprah calling.

And now Oprah wanted to build an entire show around her book!.

It was incredible!

It was awesome!

It was terrifying

She wasn't ready for it.

She told them all No No No.

* * *

Barbara Walters called.

She called Barbara back.

After all, it was BARBARA WALTERS!!!

His Story

HIS agent called to tell him there was an incredible script out there that had just been snapped up by one of the most prestigious film companies in town.

No one had been able to get their hands on it yet but the word on the street was that the movie would earn its leading man an Oscar.

Was he interested?

Not particularly.

He didn't need the money.

He didn't really need the Oscar.

Of course he'd like to have one but. . . .
and more important

He had actually planned on taking some time off. He was considering a trip to Tibet with Jim.

His agent pushed.

The part was written for him the agent insisted. The Agent never for a moment considered the incongruity of claiming to know a script was written for his famous client if no one, including the agent, had read it.

Claudia encouraged him to try to get a copy of the illusive script too.

And

When consulted, Jim insisted he read the script before making any decisions. Jim was of the opinion that this script would change his life.

Claudia hoped that once he became involved in a new project things would settle down between them and they could get on with their lives.

She told herself once again that everything was going to be all right between them.

She had never been so wrong

Her Story

This was her first time as a writer slash producer.

Seymour insisted she add the producers title to her credits.

He warned her that it was the only way she could ensure the movie maintaining the vision of the script.

* * *

Greg was hired to direct the film. She knew that Greg wanted to do it mainly because he hoped somehow he could persuade her to come back to him.

She recommended Greg to direct not only because he was the best director for the job, but also out of guilt, because she felt she wanted to make it up to him for leaving.

The director issue settled; they concentrated on the leading actor.

* * *

As the writer, she had her own ideas of course, but she didn't intend to voice them. Even though she was encouraged by all to do so.

After all, they insisted, it was her script. She must have had someone particular in mind when she wrote it.

She lied and denied she had anyone special in mind.

The producer, a Hollywood super-insider with a Spielberg reputation, suggested that the three of them draw up a list of the actors they thought best suited for the leading role.

She spent two nights going over names and making up a list.

After a lot of thought and consideration, she left his name off of it.

Had she not been so in love with him, he would have been at the top of her list and she knew it.

After all, who else had she imagined in every frame, whose voice had she heard in her head, repeating the lines she wrote.

The entire rhythm of the lead character was geared toward *his* mannerisms, his walk, his style, his speech patterns.

* * *

Greg and the Producer placed his name in the number one position on their lists.

His Story

OBTAINING a copy of the script was proving to be nearly impossible.

The producing studio was keeping it under wraps.

Which only further peaked his interest.

And after all, he wasn't a major star for nothing!

His agent, a superstar agent of the same magnitude (almost) as Seymour, made a few more phone calls.

Her Story

SHE had a thousand and ten second thoughts.

How could she have ever agreed to an interview with Barbara Walters?

She couldn't have been more nervous or more afraid.

Seymour called a dozen times to tell her more and more "good news" about the book:

3rd week on the best seller list
and the screenplay:

Every agent in town was trying to get a copy of the script for their clients.

The more Seymour called to reassure her, the more crazed she became.

She dyed her hair red.

Beth made her dye it back to blond.

What if he's watching and he doesn't recognize your hair color?" she complained. Are you nuts?

That was the whole point. Better to not ever know and have her illusions than to look in any way as she had that night and be rejected.

She tried once again to make her friend listen to reason, but Beth would have none of that.

Beth had read *Once Upon a Time* over a dozen times she reminded her friend, and she, Beth, knew the truth! Furthermore, she commented, "how on earth could anyone have written such an incredible love story without knowing it was true!!

* * *

Seymour phoned yet again, this time to tell her *his* agent had a copy of the script.

At the actor's request, thank you very much!

Seymour was ecstatic. He was a very difficult actor to get a script too. By following Seymour's suggestion and refusing to give anyone a copy of the script they had flushed him out and *he had actually asked them for the script*.!

Was he, Seymour, a genius or what?

She paced the house, wandering from room to room.

She ignored the telephone.

She ignored the door bell.

She ignored *everything* else.

Oh my god, he was going to read her script!

She went downstairs and got into her refurbished and freshly repainted red 280 ZX and drove to Newport Beach.

Her heart raced.

It was Christmas Eve and she was 5 years old and still believed in miracles.

She was excited beyond belief.

She was terrified beyond belief.

What if he didn't remember her at all?

What if none of it had been real for him?

She wanted to throw up.

Instead, she drove past Newport to San Diego.

She stopped south of San Diego at the border.

Skipping the country? she asked herself.

And laughed

She turned the car around and headed for home.

All this
and Barbara Walters was coming in the morning.

His Story

THE messenger arrived at 10:00 in the morning with the much talked about screenplay.

He decided it was just too early on a beautiful day to stay inside and read so he laid the envelope on the table by the front door and stepped outside.

Television trucks lined the road from in front of his place down past the newly renovated house Claudia had told him about.

Oh oh. One of his neighbors was doing the television interview bit.

A short stocky man walked by carrying cable.
The logo on the back of the jacket announced
The Barbara Walters Show

He went back into his house and out the beach side door for a long walk.

Barbara Walters, huh. Well, she was good and she was fair. And she was *very* sharp. Barbara had this disarming way of asking tough questions in a bright and airy manner as though they were nothing. And she was oh so pleasant when you said no.

So you relaxed and thought all that was behind you and the next thing you knew she asked the same question again. By the end of the day everyone was so chummy you found yourself spilling your guts out to her He'd almost done it himself.

He wished his unknown neighbor luck.

Her Story

THE crew arrived first.

At six in the morning.

Her personal assistant, Deborah let them in and supervised them while they worked.

Which mostly meant she got them coffee and stayed out of their way.

Barbara arrived a 7:30 and suggested the two of them go out for breakfast while the crew finished setting up.

It would give them an opportunity to get comfortable with each other, Barbara said. They could discuss the parameters of the interview.

It would be a long, all day, all evening, interview, Barbara reminded her. They would obviously shoot much more than would make the cut.

Barbara was so pleased to meet her. She loved the book and like so many others, had read it more than once.

Breakfast was pleasant and went quickly. As nervous as she was, Barbara was adept at putting her at ease.

A false sense of security, she reminded herself.

His Story

HE was back inside his house by 11:00. Refreshed and eager now to settle down with the script and a hot cup of coffee.

He picked up the envelope containing the script and looked it over.

He was just starting to open it when

The doorbell rang.

Another messenger.

This one was delivering what appeared to be a book in a large envelope.

He decided it must be for Claudia. Probably the galleys for the beauty book she'd just written. He set it aside without looking at the label.

The second book arrived at just a little past 11:30.

He placed the second book on top of the first one.

By noon he had received two more books.

And he still hadn't opened the envelope containing the script.

* * *

The phone rang.

He spoke briefly with his agent, confirming that yes, the script had been delivered and, yes, he promised faithfully to read it today, right away.

With that, he took the envelope into the kitchen and sat down at the table.

He opened the envelope carefully and had just begun to withdraw his future,

When. . . .

Claudia wandered into the kitchen. "I'm back".

It was a moment frozen in time.

Did he want a cup of coffee?

He nodded.

Claudia poured two cups and handed one to him.

He took a drink and smiled his thank you.

My God, she thought, he is so beautiful and she loved him so much! She wanted desperately to put her arms around him, kiss him and. . . .

For the first time she noticed he was holding something in his hand.

An envelope.

Just an envelope.

She stared.

There was something about it.

The way he was holding it perhaps . . .

Claudia was suddenly overwhelmed with the urge to grab the envelope from him before he could see it's contents.

Yank it out of his hands and stomp it to smithereens!

Throw it away! Burn it! Shred it! . . .

Whatever you do, she thought,

Do not let him open that envelope !!!!.

Her hand reached out involuntarily to grab the envelope from him . . .

He looked up at her. Was she all right?

She looked a little odd.

Claudia stared down at her hand and ordered it to pick up her coffee cup. She sipped.

She gave him a nervous smile and assured him she was fine.

Just fine.

He informed her there were several packages for her on the table in the foyer.

Oh, she said. Thanks. She looked at the envelope again.

He had just begun pulling the contents out of it.

She hurried to get her packages.

Leaving him alone with the envelope

And his fate

* * *

He pulled the script from the envelope and opened it.

Her name leapt up at him!

Claudia re entered the kitchen, carrying the stack of packages.

He was staring at the script.

They're all for you. Claudia informed him.

In response to his querying look: and his "What?"

Take a look. They're all addressed to you.

He laid the script aside, accepted the stack of envelopes from her and looked through them.

Sure enough, they were addressed to him.

He tore the top off the first envelope and dumped a book out onto the table.

Claudia picked it up, looked at it and then handed the book to him.

Oh, I was going to buy that book today but they were sold out. Everyone'is talking about it. It's supposed to be the most romantic book of the decade. My agent suggested I try to option it. Who sent it?

He examined the book. He turned it over.

No back of the book photo of the author.

Claudia explained it was the number one best seller.

He opened the book.

Once Upon A Time-
-A Modern Fairy Tale

He stared at the author's name.

He opened the script cover.

He stared at the author's name.

He turned the book over again.

He turned the envelope the book had come in upside down and shook it.

A note fell out of the envelope.

The note was from Jim.

All fairy tales should have a happy ending. This book looks like a glass slipper to me Give Cinderella my regards. I can't wait to meet her again.

Jim

* * *

Claudia watched him with a growing sense of dread.

He tore open the second envelope and dumped the contents on the table in front of him.

It was another copy of the same book.

Claudia took a deep breath and fought to quell the panic rising inside her throat. What was going on?

Meanwhile:

He reached inside the envelope and pulled out a note from his best friend.

The one he had known forever.

The one he had confided in so long ago.

He read the note.

What else can I say. I was wrong. Very very wrong. I am sorry.

I was an idiot!

Find her!"

The third book also had a note.

This is a fantastic love story. You really should read it. And, if they make a movie, you should play the lead because this story reminded me of you somehow.

Be a dear and find the author and have her autograph this book for me."

Love, Mom.

Her Story

THEY began the tour of the house in the combination parking garage skating rink.

She skated around the well lit garage. Barbara surprised her by donning a pair of roller skates and joining her.

Barbara's producer was sure this would make a great promo for the show.

Barbara said she thought the last time she had been roller skating was with Cher and that was a looong time ago.

They collapsed on a bench laughing and removed their skates while they continued to chat. She was genuinely surprised at how easy it was to talk to Barbara Walters.

After a short break for showers and a change of clothes they met by the pool.

The lagoon like pool was nestled to the right of the house in a beautiful setting of rocks and trees. It was completely shaded and private. It was difficult to believe, sitting around the pool on one of the huge rocks surrounding it, that just beyond the tall vine covered wood fence lay the famed California sun shine, the beach and the Pacific ocean.

Barbara commented on the beauty and the serenity of the setting.

It was decided that opening introductions should be done by the pool.

Barbara was very personable and cordial. They discussed a little about her screen writing career and then made general conversation about the world and fashion and movies and music.

Barbara smiled and told her and the viewing audience, how much she had enjoyed reading "Once Upon A Time".

Like many of the other famous and non famous readers Barbara confessed she had read the book more than once.

And then

Barbara smiled and asked the inevitable question:

Is the book about you?

Before she could answer, Barbara pointed out the obvious.

The heroine was a screenwriter and so was she.

The heroine wrote a book about her phantom lover and so had she. Or had she?

So, tell all of us now. Barbara asked nicely, Is this book about you? Is it real? And if it is, just who is this dream lover of yours?

His Story

CLAUDIA knew something significant was occurring

Is that the script everyone's been talking about?

He nodded. *It came this morning.*

She followed his eyes from the book to the script and back.

And she knew.

She didn't know how or why she knew, but she knew.

She wrote it didn't she?

It wasn't really a question.

And He wasn't at all surprised that she asked it.

I don't know. was his reply.

He looked inside the cover of the book.

The book was dedicated

To Dream Lovers Everywhere.

Claudia burned her mouth on hot coffee.

She didn't feel it.

She stared at him. The way he was studying the name on the book.

She wrote the book too didn't she?

Without taking his attention away from either the script or the book: he acknowledged that

Evidently the same person who wrote the script wrote the book, yes.

I don't know if it was her.

Claudia insisted.

She wrote it.

Maybe. He conceded.

Another blind sip of scalding coffee. She didn't even feel the coffee burning her throat,. Nothing could surpass the pain already searing through her heart.

She wanted to scream, yet her voice was surprisingly calm.

And you still love her. She said at last.

He looked across the table and deep into her eyes.

His hand reached out to take hers.

She jerked her hand away. She was afraid she would lose control if he touched her.

Yes, he said quietly, *I still love her.*

I've never stopped loving her."

He sighed

But you already knew that.

Yes, she admitted. I already knew that.

Claudia . . . You know how much you mean to me.

But you've never stopped loving *her*"

Our relationship means a great deal to me. I value you. You are a dear friend.

She winced when he said friend.

He leaned across the table and kissed her gently on the cheek.

She fought back the tears.

But yes, I've never stopped loving her.

She didn't know what else to do so she took yet another drink of coffee.

She hated coffee.

She really did.

As for him . . .

He could feel her pain and he wanted to help her.

There's no logical reason why this script would be by her.

Or the book.

Do you know how many writers there are out there?

What are the odds?

Claudia tried to smile. The acrid taste of the coffee rose in her throat and she thought she might vomit.

But that won't matter, She said, Because you'll still love her. Whether she wrote them or not. You'll still love her.

She said the words with finality.

Please she prayed. Tell me that isn't true.

His eyes never left hers.

Yes He said. I will still love her. Whoever she is, Wherever she is I will always still love her.

If I never see her again at all, I will always still love her."

She sighed.

Pause. . . .

For you then, I hope she wrote them.

Claudia stood up. She tossed her unfinished coffee into the sink and rinsed out the cup, dried it and put the cup back in the cupboard.

She wanted to scream!

I hope she never comes back! she wanted to yell!

She yearned to tell him how much she, Claudia, loved him. How happy they could be together if he would just love her the way he loved *her.*

She said nothing.

There was nothing left to say.

It wouldn't matter anyway.

She realized with sudden new found clarity that it never had been about how much she loved him.

It was now, and always had been, about how much *they* loved each other.

The silence between them grew.

They didn't know what else to say to each other.

Neither of them mentioned her long ago promise that If the mysterious orange slicing woman should miraculously appear, she Claudia had vowed to wish them the best. And go on her way.

But they looked at one another and they knew that each of them was remembering that promise and wondering if she would fulfill it.

But I Love You! she wanted to shout!

It was becoming more and more awkward.

He picked up the script and one of the books.

Well, I guess I should start reading the script anyway.

You'll tell me?.

Of course.

Her Story

IS the book true? Barbara continued. Is there a mystery lover?

And then, Barbara smiled and took her off the hook by suggesting they take a lunch break.

The network catered lunch for all. The crew ate under a large tent on the beach.

Barbara, Gayle, the producer and Deborah had lunch with her by the pool. The location afforded them some privacy while giving the crew the necessary freedom to set up their gear in the rest of the house.

Lunch wasn't just for eating of course. It was also an opportunity to evaluate how the interview was going so far and to discuss what they might do next.

Barbara put everyone at ease. Barbara had laughed off her non answer to the question about the book.

And it hadn't come up since.

Barbara said there were going to be more questions about her background and about her old relationship with Greg.

Probably ask if he was the Dream Lover. in her book.

Barbara said she could sense that while *she* was proud of her house and her work, it was easy to see she was uncomfortable talking about them.

I'll bet, Barbara observed, that if this interview was part of your book, your toughest chapters to write would be this part.

She quickly agreed.

Actually, she said, I'd probably edit out the entire sequence.

Writers are like that. They aren't used to 'showing off'. Actors, singers, they never have problems with this part. Well, just hang in there and try to relax. Remember, another chapter is just around the corner.

Barbara excelled at giving interviewees the erroneous impression that they were in charge of their own interviews.

His Story

HE took the script, the notes and one of the books into his office and sat down in the leather chair behind the 1920s library table that served as his desk.

He couldn't concentrate.

He found himself staring.

First at the leather sofa where he'd spent part of each day lying, thinking of her. Then to the bookshelves, filled with personal momentous, old scripts videos and new scripts sent by his agent for his perusal

Along with the scripts were various career awards.

Two Golden Globes, three People's Choice Awards, a mock Oscar an old girlfriend had bought him as conciliation for the real Oscar he didn't get four years earlier. It said Best Actor (no matter what the Academy says)

He swiveled his chair. The walls were covered with movie posters and signed photographs and other awards.

Claudia's decorating.

Before she'd moved in the room had stayed essentially the same since he'd bought the house. Sofa, desk, small refrigerator, chair, TV. The bookshelves used to contain only books and scripts. The walls had been blank.

Claudia had turned the room into a cinematic version of what an actor's office should look like. Surprisingly, he found he liked it.

He continued his procrastination.

He stared out the window. The water sparkled in the afternoon sun. Maybe he should go for a long walk . . .

His gaze rested briefly on the script and books on the desk in front of him. Waiting for his attention.

He took a deep breath stood up, combing his fingers through his hair.

What if it wasn't her. What if it was just a coincidence . . . a mistake.

He realized how much he was counting on having at last found her. Another deep breath and he paced around the desk, back to the window.

More pacing.

He laid down on the sofa and stared blindly at the ceiling, seeing nothing in front of him. Visualizing instead the way she'd looked when stepping off the elevator In Paris. So beautiful.

He sprang to his feet and returned to his desk, picked up the script and leafed through it, then back to the title page and stared at the name.

Stupid, he thought. Read the damn thing and get it over with. Her or not her, it's still a great script they say. That good ol Oscar role every actor hopes to get at least once in a career. . . .

He laid the script down and picked up the book. Inside the back cover was a short biography on the author, nothing too revealing and no photo. He raised the book over his head, tempted to throw it across the room, stared at the name on the cover. .

What if it wasn't her.

Until Claudia had suggested that *she* wrote the book and the script he hadn't allowed himself to acknowledge the possibility.

You receive scripts all of the time, he reminded himself, and you've never ever not once in the last three years thought any of them were written by her. Why now?

Even without the book and the notes from his friends he had sensed something about the script the minute he'd removed it from the envelope. It was somehow impregnated with her with her essence, her spirit . . .

He prowled the room again and again, his eyes never leaving the book and the script still waiting for him to read them.

What if it isn't her . . .

What if it is?

If it isn't her, could he survive the disappointment, the plunge into despair he knew he would experience.

And if it was her, then what.

What did he do; where did he go. . . . where did they go from here?

Could a dream lover become a reality?

He laughed at himself derisively. Just pick up the script and read it he told himself.

At least then maybe you'll know. Or read the damn book and see what your friends saw.

But what if? *What if?* . . .

He was too restless, to excited to just sit and read. He needed more time to consider the consequences.

To reflect.

He remembered his 10th Christmas. His dad had earned a very large unexpected bonus and his parents had spent most of it on Christmas for him and his brother.

The sight of all the presents under the tree had overwhelmed him; rooted him to the stairs. His brother had jumped around him and literally dove into all the gifts while his parents stood by laughing. But he had been unable to move. Unable to grasp the fact that the 10 speed under the tree and at least half of all those other wrapped boxes actually belonged to him.

He felt that way now.

It might actually be her. After all this time he might have actually found her. And he couldn't seem to move off center.

French doors led him into an enclosed Japanese garden, lush grass shaded by trees, with a waterfall tumbling over rocks down, down into a small pond and stream.

He wandered around the garden, sat down briefly on one of the stone benches, shook his head in wonder.

He tried meditating but it was no use. He just couldn't concentrate on anything but the material waiting on his desk.

And her.

And the possibility of them.

At last. *Them.*

He looked up at the blue sky and smiled.

Maybe, he thought. Maybe today the world will have changed.

He walked purposefully into his office.

He sat down in his high backed chair and spread the script and books on the desk in front of him.

He rose, walked around the desk and sat on the sofa.

He stood up again.

He paced.

* * *

Which one should he read first?

The script.

After all, he'd promised his agent.

He opened the book, then closed it again.

It would wait he told himself.

His agent would not.

He picked up the script.

He grabbed two of the notes and sat back down on the sofa.

He was making himself crazy.

He put the notes on the book and sat down in his big chair, .script in hand.

And Finally,

He began to read.

CLAUDIA

CLAUDIA watched him leave the kitchen and her life.

She breathed a sigh.

He'd left behind the rest of the books.

Claudia examined each envelope they'd arrived in; then each book.

She poured herself a glass of Evian and sat down at the table to read through The Book.

She remembered all too clearly the notes that had accompanied each book. Glass slippers and Cinderella . . .

Just what she wanted to hear, right?

She took a drink of water and began reading.

She knew immediately, of course, who the book was about.

After all

Hadn't he told her all about New Years Eve and the green dress—ad nausea?

It made her want to throw up!

It did make her cry.

Another drink of water. She set the bottle on the counter. Water wasn't what she needed right now.

She wasn't a drinker. Not normally. But this required something a lot stronger than water.

She retrieved a bottle of Chablis from the wine closet and examined it. It was the most expensive bottle of wine she'd ever purchased. Two thousand dollars.

The wine had been a present from her to him when she'd returned from New York.

Right after he'd had this fantasy about rescuing *her* from some stupid cliff.

The wine was supposed to be a celebration.

They'd never opened it.

She opened it now and poured the sparkling liquid into a crystal wine glass. She took a sip and savored it's piquancy. She supposed it was an excellent vintage.

It could have been vinegar and she wouldn't have known the difference.

She refilled the glass, set the bottle on the table. Took a long drink of wine, refilled the glass again and sat down and picked up the book.

She couldn't read it.

Not word for word.

It was too painful. Too hideous to deal with.

Oh, yes there was no doubt now that the author of the book, *Once upon a Time,* And of the screenplay was the one and the only.

Ladies and Gentleman, I give you. . . .
drum roll please. . . .

The woman who slices oranges in kitchens where she isn't,

Sings songs in showers where she also isn't
and

Is rescued in rain storms by heroes in comas . . .

Another drink of wine.

More to the point, this was the woman he loved more than life itself.

She emptied the glass and re filled it.

She read through the book.

So she had been on the beach with him that night.
and in Paris too!!

Tears streamed down her face as she remembered how she'd naively believed things would be better between them after Paris . . . He'd been so happy.

She brushed aside her tears.

No wonder.

The sad fact was that it was an incredible love story.

That is, if your heart wasn't being broken into smaller and smaller pieces as you read.

Even with everything he had shared with her about them; she was totally unprepared for the intensity and the depth of the love they so obviously shared.

She couldn't compete against this kind of love. No body could.

Someday, she might wonder to herself why she was so willing to accept every word in the book, every scenario as absolute truth. But for now she poured still more wine, took another drink and wept.

And then.

She kept the promise given to him that night at the inn in Maine so long ago.

She went into the bedroom, and packed her suitcase.

She left her keys to the house and a note in the kitchen.

Then she drove herself into town and moved back into her own apartment.

He didn't even notice she was gone.

Her Story

AFTER lunch, Barbara showed the viewing audience to be, the newly redecorated and renovated house.

The elevator opened onto a huge living area.

They strolled through the large open space, one and a half stories high which managed somehow to be elegant and cozy and funky at the same time.

They chatted about movies and books and she found herself being more and more open.

In response to Barbara's question "Where did she learn to write so well?", she said mostly from reading John D. MacDonald books while she was growing up.

Most of their conversation would never make the show of course. But even the most casual conversation had it's purpose. Making the guest more at ease; plus giving Barbara information about her that she didn't realize she was sharing.

They toured the house and it almost began to feel as though she was entertaining a friend instead of being interviewed by the famous Barbara Walters.

Glass doors lead to the deck. Large pots of flowers and trees were placed strategically around the deck. There was a table, chairs and several loungers.

His Story

HE recognized the story at once.

This was the script she had described to him in the garden., New Years Eve. And then later as they laid side by side, curled against each other in his bed.

The story she was so dedicated to writing.

He closed the script again and stared at it.

His emotions were off the Richter scale.

He took a deep breath and tried to center himself.

He opened the script cover and read her name aloud.

He said it again. The sound of it made him laugh.

He said it again. And again!

He tasted it. He savored it.

He created her image in front of him and spoke her name to her.

Did she reward him with a smile?

He shouldn't let himself get his hopes up like this.

Maybe it was just a coincidence.

A fluke of nature.

A perverse joke of the universe.

But maybe—just maybe

It Really Was Her!

Even if it was her, he reminded himself.

She might not be aware of the dreams.

He focused on Jim's words.

He would believe in love.

At least he would try.

In the meantime.

His own true love at long last had a name and that was a beginning.

Her Story

WHILE the first floor was one and a half stories high and unique,, the second floor of the house was more conventional.

A one bedroom apartment for Deborah. And a two bedroom guest apartment.

The third floor contained a state of the art theater seating 20 on comfortable chairs and sofas. There was a small lobby off the freight elevator with a popcorn machine, soft drink machine and candy trays. Plus a small refrigerator with wine and champagne, and an ice maker.

All of the floors, including the office loft, were reachable by the freight elevator or a windowed staircase.

The tour ended and. . . .

They were downstairs in the living room area

Barbara sat on one of two sofas and invited her to sit too.

They had changed clothes once again.

It seemed every segment had to have new clothes.

They talked about her film writing career. What did she think of the directors treatment of her work? Was that why she was now a producer on her new script?

Barbara had read the advance copy of the talked about script provided in the name of publicity to Barbara after she had agreed not to talk about the script except in the most vague terms. In other words she was allowed to talk about how great it was, just not reveal anything about the plot.

Barbara had no objection to the terms. A celebrity herself, Barbara enjoyed the special perks her fame sometimes brought her. It was exciting to be one of the privileged few to read a script before it was produced, or a book before it was released.

In this instance, praising the script was going to present no problem at all. Barbara would never praise a bad script or book. She had far too much integrity for that. If Barbara had not liked the script she would have either canceled the interview or confined it to the book and it's author. However, that wasn't a problem in this case.

As for her:

It wasn't difficult to see the enthusiasm in her voice when she spoke about the film. Or the way her eyes lit up when she talked about the plans for publicity, for using the film to raise money for local organizations that helped kids.

His Story

FROM the first word, he lost himself totally in the power of the script.

The story captured his complete attention. She was such a visual writer that the words flowed across the page, leading him where she wanted him to go.

He understood his character perfectly. All the nuances.

It was, as promised, an incredible role for an actor. The character experienced so many different emotions in the course of the script.

Love, friendship, loss, joy, anger, fear, recovery, regret and love.

* * *

Hours later he finished reading the script and just sat there.

The script was so absorbing, so real, that when you stopped reading, you felt, for a moment that you were still part of that reality. At any moment you expected one of the other characters in the script to walk through the door and begin talking to you.

It took him more than a few minutes to reaclimatize himself to the world around him.

He recalled his agent's words and he agreed.

This script was so powerful that if it were acted and directed as well as it was written there would be Oscars for everyone.

And she wrote it.

Her Story

IT was late afternoon.

During a much needed break, they walked out onto the deck.

The fog was beginning to drift inland.

She had a sudden memory of the night they made love in his house. Meeting on the beach that night in a fog much like this fog. . . .

She relived the moment he turned and first saw her sitting next to him. She smiled to herself.

She wasn't aware of Barbara's sharp assessment of the look on her face. And the reporter's curiosity as to the reason behind the smile.

They stood in companionable silence and watched the fog erase the world in front of them . . .

Barbara had read *One Upon a Time* several times before the interview was arranged so there wasn't anything in the book, Barbara couldn't recall with ease. They watched the fog swirl around them and Barbara hazarded a private guess that she could tell exactly which memory was behind her interviewee's smile.

Look, Barbara said, this isn't 60 Minutes. I'm not trying to expose any secrets here. You understand that don't you? On the other hand, it is my job to ask the questions the public is asking.

The truth is you have written a very romantic, provocative book. And the similarities to your own life are, well, they're there. I can't just ignore that. And, besides, if the story is true,

she laughed,

and if you aren't crazy,

well, it is an incredible fairy tale.

She nodded, unable to find the words to respond to Barbara's honesty. .

Again Barbara shifted gears.

Barbara praised her on the interview so far. She told a few stories about other nervous interviewees. About spilled coffee and dropped mikes that fell into embarrassing places . . .

They laughed together and she relaxed.

Barbara said they would take a long break in an hour, have a light dinner and then finish the interview.

Was she up to it?

She found herself smiling; at ease, for the first time.

This wasn't so bad after all.

She was even kind of having fun.

Maybe she would do Oprah live instead of on the telephone.

And then Rosie.
She would really enjoy meeting Rosie in person . . .

Barbara was once again utilizing her superb skills to make the impossible look easy.

His Story

NOW. He said to himself.

At last.

Once Upon a Time, the book.

He laid the script aside.

His hands were trembling when he reclaimed the book and the notes.

He read the notes again first.

Cinderella's slipper. . . .

Jim was certain after reading the book that she wrote it.

How could he be so sure?

He re read the apology from his best friend.

They hadn't just phoned and said 'hey, go buy this book.

They hadn't just called and said I read a really interesting book that you should read. . . .

None of the normal things.

No, they had each strongly felt the need to send him a copy of the book along with a message to *find her*. Even his best friend who hadn't believe she existed now suddenly did.

They didn't mail the books. They sent them by messenger!

Even his mother sensed something different about this book . . .

He re read the dedication.

To Dream Lovers everywhere

And his heart skipped a beat. Weren't they—didn't that describe them perfectly? Did the dedication refer to the song they sang together .

Well, he could wonder forever . . .

Or he could read the book.

He took a deep breath and turned to the first page.

Her Story

FOR an hour they did basic pick up shots and talked casually about family and friends, career choices and dreams for the future.

Barbara was accomplishing several things at this time.

First and foremost, of course, she was putting her guest at ease, edging out those final butterflies everyone got at the end. And more important Barbara was actually gathering information for the upcoming final segment. The most important part of the interview.

All the rest of it, the tour of the house, the meals, the chit chat was in preparation for this moment.

Even her customary excellent research couldn't replace the 'feelings' that came from spending time with her interviewee. During this long day, Barbara had used her extraordinary interviewing skills to weave a tapestry of her guest.

She knew by now which questions made her guest skittish, which made her smile and which made her blush.

A consummate professional, Barbara had made mental notes on body language when they discussed certain subjects. Even the way she said no to some questions told Barbara the direction of the *Big Interview*

The final set up came during dinner. Again, Barbara, her producer Gayle, Deborah and the 'guest' in her own house, had dinner together.

Barbara explained that she would be spending a large portion of the final segment on the book,

Once upon a time.

She noted the slight flush on her guest's face.

The telephone rang and Deborah went off to answer it.

Deborah came back with a note that she handed to her employer.

According to Deborah's note, Seymour had called to say that *he* had a copy of the script and that the plan was to set up a dinner meeting at Jimmy's for the following week.

We're heading for Oscars, kiddo! Seymour bragged. You get two. One for producing and the other for writing. Everyone else gets one. Me, I get my usual fifteen percent.

She fought to maintain her composure.

She closed her eyes and held her breath.

And Barbara saw it all!

They went off for the last change of clothes. She to her bathroom; Barbara, her producer in tow ,to the private trailer outside.

Of course she had offered her own room or the upstairs guest apartment for Barbara but Barbara said she was used to the trailer and besides it gave her and the producer a last minute chance to go over the final notes.

She took another quick shower, did her hair and make up under the guidance of the studio make up person, and finished dressing.

The butterflies in her stomach fought each other for supremacy.

He was reading her script.

He might watch this show.

He might read her book.

And most important of all. . . .

She was going to come face to face with him in less than a week . . .

As for Barbara:

In her trailer, as her make up person put the final touches to her eyes and brushed out her hair, Barbara asked her producer what she thought of the show so far.

Gayle said thought it was going to be a good show. She was sort of the Meg Ryan of writers. Very likable. The audience was going to eat her up. And the spin on tying her into the book was going especially well she thought.

Barbara agreed. Make sure we have fresh tape in the cameras before we start this last segment and whatever happens don't stop filming. I have a feeling about this one.

Barbara's producer, long familiar with her famous star's hunches, ran off to make sure her orders were carried out.

H*is* S*tory*

HE turned to the first chapter and began . . .

His Story

ON New Years Eve a famous actor went to a party in Beverly Hills. He wore traditional black tie. He wandered around the room studying the other guests.

He slammed the book shut!.

His heart echoed in his ears. He was having trouble breathing and his eyes felt suddenly moist.

Roberta Flack had written a song once.

Killing Me Softly With His Song . . .

All about someone singing a song of the listeners life.

He understood now how she must have felt.

He opened the book and read the beginning all over again and once again he slammed the book shut and jumped up.

He stared at the book as though it were intent on biting him.

He paced the office.

He walked into the garden.

He considered calling Jim and decided against it. This was his to figure out.

He took deep breaths while he attempted to understand what he had just read.

This was just not possible

No one could know all of that!

Even if she was the one—even if she had been there that night. There was no way she could know how he felt, what he thought . . .

It was Impossible!

On the other hand he reminded himself . . .

Remember the cliffs and the fog and all the rest. The very miracle of their love . . .

Nothing was impossible where they were concerned.

Hadn't they already proven that over and over again.

Another deep breath.

The phone was ringing when he walked inside.

He ignored the ring and unplugged the phone.

He grabbed a Diet Coke from the small refrigerator built into the bookcase and drank most of it in one gulp before sitting.

He closed his eyes and braced himself.

And then he read again . . .

* * *

all about

His Story.

Her Story.

It was all there!

Paris.

The Rescue.

The fog.

New Years Eve

What he said.

What she said.

What he thought. . . . How he felt . . .

How?!

He wanted to shout.

He wanted to laugh!

He did laugh!

He continued reading.

* * *

Learning for the first time the way she felt about what was going on between them.

Filling in, finally,
those missing pieces.

Knowing at last for sure that she did love him as much as he loved her!

* * *

He came to the end of the book . . .

The dinner at the restaurant where they finally met face to face.

It was the only part of their story that hadn't happened yet.

Would it happen?

Would it happen in that manner?

His cell phone rang.

It was his agent.

What did he think of the script? Wasn't it everything the agent said it would be?

Yes, he agreed. It was everything his agent had said and more.

The agent continued:

They wanted to set up a meeting between him and the producers and the writer.

Monday at Jimmy's in Century City. 8:00.

It's in the bag! I'm absolutely one hundred percent certain the part and the Oscar that goes with it has your name written all over it.

* * *

And so it was
that after all this time.

After all of the pain

After all of the joy

After all of the waiting.

It was to be as simple as that.

* * *

They would meet in a restaurant.

Just as she had written.

At Jimmy's.

Just as she had described.

Would she wear the green dress? He wondered.

Would he be able to play out the scenario as written?

Well, he was an actor. And he certainly knew how to play *this* part.

Didn't he?

You could even say the part was written for him.

The agent concluded the conversation with his customary greeting to Claudia.

Claudia! He had forgotten all about her.

He hung up the phone and went to find her.

He didn't know what he would say.

Well, actually He did know *what* he would say.

He just wasn't sure *how* he would say it.

Claudia was a good person.

She'd saved his sanity. What could he say?

He had to tell her righr away. It was the only fair thing to do.

* * *

He searched the house for her and

found the keys to the house and the note on the kitchen counter.

the note said.

The author of the book lives 1/2 mile up the beach. It's the new loft house. You can't miss it. I wish you all the happiness.

Love Claudia

Her Story

THE living area had a brick fireplace with sofas on either side. A low table sat between the sofas. There were flowers on the table. Small, so as not to interfere with the eye contact of the people talking.

Barbara had changed into a very stylish, feminine dress.

Clothing was always selected ahead of time so that the clothes were in harmony with the décor and didn't clash with her guest's.

Barbara still had shuddering memories of the famous star who had her house decorated in bold colors at the time of their preliminary interview. However when Barbara had arrived on the day of the shoot, with a dress in a bold style to accompany the room she discovered that the owner of the house had redecorated for the interview and now the entire room was done in French pastels. There had been a huge scurry to find another dress at the last minute.

No one likes surprises right before the camera rolls.

Especially not the one who is supposed to be springing the surprises.

* * *

She had given a lot of thought to what she would wear in this most important part of the show.

And finally she had given in to Beth's suggestion—demand—that she wear for this special occasion,

A green silk dress with a square neckline; spaghetti straps, a sexy lace up back and a long sleeved jacket.

A jacket which, Beth made her promise, faithfully, she would remove during the interview.

The dress was a perfect match for the one described in her novel.

It had arrived only yesterday. An unexpected gift from a very famous designer who had fallen in love with her book. And whipped up the green dress as a gift.

She was reluctant to wear the dress at first.

Are you crazy! Beth had said. It's an *Omen*! He might see the show! You want him to know who you are don't you?

No.

Yes.

I think so.

Both Barbara and the producer were pleased that she'd volunteered to wear the green dress without them having to ask.

Millions of Americans had read the book.

They would know all about the green dress and they would make their own guesses as to why it was being worn for the interview. It was almost like an *omen.*

Gayle was beginning to share Barbara's hunch and she reminded the film crew to not stop shooting

No matter what else was happening!

* * *

They were once again in the living area, sitting across from each other.

Barbara had been asking innocent questions.

About success

About the book itself.

Barbara said the book had seemed very real.

She smiled and thanked Barbara for the compliment on her writing abilities.

Barbara changed the subject once again.

Barbara: Okay, let's get personal.

Personal, huh. Oh, oh. She took a visible deep breath as though bracing herself for the next question, shuddered and smiled bravely. (It was only partially an act)

Okay, she said, let's do it. I'm as ready as I'm ever going to be.

Barbara inquired about Greg and she noted the quick response that Greg was 'just a good friend'.

She didn't want Greg—or *him*—to see this and get any wrong ideas.

So, it's safe to say, Greg Lyons is not the dream lover in your book.

Barbara made a great show of grinning and checking Greg's name off of a supposed list in front of her.

One down, she said.

Barbara asked about other romantic interests. Baiting the trap for another question about the book.

The response to each question had to be carefully considered before she could give it. This wasn't an interview any longer. It was a mine field. How did she respond and protect herself without denying the love she held closest to her heart and soul.

She explained that she didn't have a lot of time for a romantic life right now. What with the movie and all.

Barbara talked about the intensity of the book. How passionate it was.

She said that while she didn't want to give away too much of the story, just in case there were a few souls stranded on an island somewhere who hadn't read it yet, but

she did want to talk about the part about the cliffs and the rescue . . . That was absolutely riveting. Barbara said. She said she couldn't put the book down.

And then she added:

It must have been horrifying to live through all that.

She smiled nervously and fielded the question awkwardly.

How was she supposed to respond to that. I wouldn't know? I wrote it that way. So she said nothing really.

Barbara kept smiling:

Of course she could deny it outright. Set Barbara straight and remind her once again that it was a book; not a true story; just a book.

But, she wondered, if she did that, would that make the magic go away forever?

Would she be putting *them* at risk?

And if he saw the show and he heard her deny the truth; would he never come to her again?

Would she lose him forever?

Forever was such a long time.

She realized that agreeing to this interview had been a mistake from the beginning. Of course Barbara was going to ask her about the book. Of course she was going to ask these questions. And if not Barbara then Rosie or -Oprah or

oh dear . . .

She should have known better.

She stalled for time with a smile.

It wasn't what she didn't say.

Well, in part, it was . . .

But at that moment, with that smile . . .

Barbara knew.

And the producer knew.

And the crew knew.

Barbara asked another question.

So, the million dollar question is. Is *Once Upon a Time* real? Does he exist? And, more important, who is he?

Come on, you can tell us. We can keep a secret.

Barbara leaned across the table as though she was about get the answer to that question and smiled expectantly.

His Story

HE re read the note.

The Loft House . . .

She was up the beach.

Less than half a mile!

Walking distance.

Running distance.

So near
and yet

So far.

* * *

What should he do now?

Should he go see her?

Should he play it cool and wait for Monday and Jimmy's?

She was just up the beach.

And Monday was a hundred years away.

So close.
and yet
so far.

* * *

He leaned against the counter and listened to his heart beating.

Even as a child he had had difficulty waiting for Christmas.

But, he was an adult now.

He had learned patience along the way . . .

There was a right time for everything . . .

Perhaps Monday was the right time for them.

On the other hand

She was just up the beach. . . .
and a heartbeat away. . . .

Her Story

BARBARA was polite and charming, and seemingly committed to uncovering the 'truth' about the book.

According to the most recent figures, Barbara informed her and the viewing audience the book had been on the top of the best seller list for weeks now.

All over the world people are reading your book, she said.

How does it feel to be part of a publishing phenomena?

Did you have any idea you would get this much attention? That your readers would get so involved with the story?

She shook her head.

She said her friends all liked the book and she liked the book but she had no idea it would touch so many people.

She was very humbled by the whole experience.

Barbara continued

I understand you're getting letters and photos from men all over the world who have read the book and are claiming to be your dream lover. Barbara told her.

She not only didn't know that but the prospect frightened her.

Her mind was running in all directions at once.

And the camera recorded it all.

She was astounded. *What? You aren't serious.*

You know, Barbara said, Several of the television tabloids have been guessing about the identity of the dream lover in your book.

Barbara went on to describe the speculation going on in the press about who the actor might be. She asked if *she* was aware of a rumor that a grad student at UCLA was actually imputing the book into the computer and trying to solve the mystery man's identity.

She was astonished! She fought down the fear.

Why would anyone do that?

I told you, speculation on the identity of the book's dream lover has become the new American pastime. Everyone wants to know.

She didn't understand why.

Barbara tried to explain. She said for whatever reason people were identifying with the book. The sheer magic of it. The fact that it read so true. The deep love between the two lead characters. The mystery surrounding their identifies . . .

And then there was the similarities between the female character and her. .

For example, the heroine in your book cut her face and worried there might be a scar.

You have a scar on your face in exactly the same place.

Barbara smiled pleasantly.

Maybe you got that scar when you fell out of bed, or fell while skating or .

She paused for emphasis and then said

Or maybe you cut your face in the middle of a thunder storm while trying to climb a cliff, she suggested.

She was still trying to think on her feet, but her feet suddenly refused to support her.

What did Barbara say? They were running information on a computer? Could they do that?

Had she given enough clues for them to figure out who he was? . . .

* * *

Barbara continued:

Let us just assume for the moment that your Dream Lover is real and that he is a famous actor. (pause) Any chance he'll be hired to star in your movie,—just like in the book?

Her voice faltered:

I couldn't say. I'm not involved in the casting.

Ah, So he is a famous actor.

Her nerves were raw. She wasn't sure what to say . . .

So there is a chance the end of your book could actually happen. Dinner at Jimmy's' restaurant. You wearing a beautiful green dress,—just like the one you're wearing tonight . . .

In fact, Barbara went on, she wanted to compliment her on the beautiful dress and then asked her where she found it.

She was thankful for the question. It afforded her the opportunity to thank the designer publicly and to give her the recognition she deserved for her generosity.

She explained to Barbara about the designer who had surprised her with the dress just the day before.

Barbara mused, That's almost like fate isn't it.

Then Barbara asked her to model the dress for them.

Considering the kindness and thoughtfulness of the designer in giving her the dress, it would have been churlish of her to refuse to show the dress off. And besides, the dress was so beautiful, she confessed she wanted to show it off.

So, she smiled and allowed as how she wasn't a model and would probably trip over her own feet, but sure she'd give it a try.

At the producer's direction, she walked across the room, posed, turned and walked back towards the camera modeling the dress, turning, opening the jacket.

Imitating models she'd seen on television,

She first put her hands on her hips and gave the audience a look at the dress front and back with the jacket pushed aside and then at the producer's further instruction, she removed the jacket and turned again,

Revealing the low cut back with the sexy lacing so well described in the book.

She gave one last model turn, then smiled timidly and walked toward the camera—and the sofa.

Barbara complimented the dress, being sure to mention the designers name, again. She also complimented her modeling skills.

She grinned and said all that TV watching must have paid off. At least she hadn't fallen down.

When they were settled again on the sofas, Barbara continued their discussion from before.

So, what do you think you'll you say when you meet him? She asked.

Barbara ignored her further protestation that it was a book, A fairy tale no less.

Instead

What if he came here tonight? Knocked on that door (she indicated the door leading to the deck)
After all, you are wearing the famous green dress.

It would be fate if he came here tonight.

If he knocked on the door and said he'd read the book and he knew he was the one.

Again she didn't know what to say. So she said nothing.

Barbara on the other hand had plenty to say!

What if the book were true. What if he knocked on that door and, say Deborah let him in and he told you he had always loved you and that he'd been looking for you all this time . . .

Just like in your book.

What would you do? What if he convinced you that everything you wrote in the book was true and. . . .

Barbara's' words resounded in her head, echoing.

What if?

As if she'd said the words aloud, Barbara continued:

Reality.

What then? Happily ever after?

After all, It's a great love story,
but I was wondering; can reality ever compete successfully with a good fairy tale?

His Story

HE covered the half mile up the beach in no time at all.

The first thing he noticed when he reached her house was the TV equipment and he realized suddenly who Barbara Walters was interviewing.

Tonight?

Not tonight. Please not tonight.

He scrunched his shoulders and squatted down in the sand, staring at the house while he sifted sand from one hand to the other.

Damn, he couldn't just barge in now could he?

Could he?

He paced the beach.

Next week wasn't so far away.

Just days really.

After all, he could hardly just walk into her house and throw out Barbara Walters.

Could he?

* * *

He could wait.

Jimmy's would be fine—perfect even.

He could wait until then.

There was something to be said
about doing it the way she'd written it.

He could envision the dinner meeting now.

Everyone at the table would have read the book -
everyone in the restaurant would have read the book!

Everyone would be watching the two of them and wondering. . . .

You would be able to cut the tension with a knife.

Reporters would be hovering. . . .

Everyone would be conjecturing.

He could do that.

It might even be fun . . .

After all this time, what were 4 more days?

He started to walk back to his house.

Just one backward glance . . .

And then . . .

She walked toward the open glass deck doors.

Her blond hair was a golden halo in the bright interior lights.

And she was wearing a green dress.

She removed the jacket and turned, and he inhaled sharply.

It was like being punched in the stomach.

The need to take her in his arms was excruciating.

She made a second turn, draped the jacket over her shoulder, and walked out of his sight.

If he didn't go now he wouldn't be able to leave.

He hesitated and then began the long long walk home.

He paused for one more backward glance . . .

Her Story

WHY not? Barbara insisted.

The book is a huge success. He's probably seen it on the shelf. Maybe one of his friends told him about it.

You've been getting all these letters from men insisting they are your dream lover. What if one of them is telling the truth?.

Her face froze. She was lousy at hiding her feelings.

Always had been.

Down deep in her stomach she *knew* Barbara was teasing. Fishing maybe. but it was just a silly speculation. Barbara wasn't serious.

Was she?

She rearranged her face and tried a Mona Lisa smile.

And Barbara knew she had her.

Not in a mean way. Barbara wasn't a mean person. But she could smell a story.

Now the only question was, who was this guy.

And would he please show up tonight in time for the taping!

Or, Barbara continued.

Maybe the producers of your movie will really hire him. Wouldn't that be something if your restaurant scene actually happened?

But what if he came here tonight?

As if on cue, Deborah walked into the room and *there was a knock on the deck door.*

* * *

Everybody jumped!

Then they all laughed nervously.

Sort of like telling ghost stories and then one shows up, somebody joked.

The cameraman aimed his camera at the door.

There was another knock.

Barbara felt a tingle of excitement and prayed the cameras would keep rolling.

She was about to tell Deborah to explain to whoever it was that she was busy.

And then

She saw who was at the door and. . . .

And she thought about Barbara's prophetic words.

What if he came here tonight. . . .

What if?

It was him.

Oh my God, she was terrified. And excited and. . . . terrified.

And she couldn't stop staring at him.

She was unaware of the look that passed between Barbara and the producer. She was unaware of everything and everyone, except him.

The cameraman kept the camera on the action.

Deborah stepped away from the door and he walked in.

He walked in.

Just like any mortal man.

Instead of the one who possessed her heart and soul.

She stood up slowly.

She couldn't take her eyes off of him.

As for him . . .

A man dying of thirst looks at water the way he looked at her.

There she was. Standing across the room from him.

For over three years he had been insisting to everyone, including himself, that she was real.

And that he would find her!

And now, there she was. Across a room. Flesh and blood. . . . looking at him with those incredible green eyes . . .

And suddenly he didn't know what to do. . . .

Did the green dress signify anything?

The one meant to resemble the famous New Years Eve dress. The one described so eloquently in her book as the dress worn to the restaurant.

Was she somehow expecting him here tonight?

Was it a sign?

Or was this just a variation on an old theme.
another dream?

and then . . .

They walked across the room toward each other, pulled by an invisible magnet.

At first Barbara's heart sank.

This was one of the most private stars in Hollywood.

And then Barbara saw the book in his hand.

Oh, my God, Barbara thought. Please don't let him notice the camera. And please don't let the camera run out of tape.

* * *

As for them:

He was there. In her house. Standing in front of her, and

She couldn't speak.

She was there. At last . . .

In front of him.

And he couldn't speak.

For a moment nobody breathed.

And then.

Hello.

Hello.

They stood there. Less than 2 feet apart.

Two people alone in a room full of people.

Everyone else in the room was as frozen as they were.

And they all knew!

Prince Charming had just walked in the door carrying a glass slipper.

If Barbara was going to call casting and ask them to send over a Dream Lover for her show, *he* would be it. She should have guessed. But what about Claudia?

Once you knew it all made such sense.

No one spoke. No one moved.

They were all silent witnesses to magic.

As for them.

They were two people in an enchanted trance.

* * *

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt—I live -up the beach. .My agent sent your script over today. I didn't realize you had company . . .

that's all right . . . I mean.we were just. . . .

I read your script. It's incredible . . . A masterpiece.

How many times had she imagined him saying those very words?

Was she imagining now?

Was this all just another illusion?.

Thank you . . . I, I'm so glad you liked it.

And they couldn't stop looking at each other.

And then

The words just ended.

Neither of them could seem to summon any more.

And the cameras rolled on and on. . . .

He didn't know what to do. She wasn't giving him any clue. He felt like an idiot. Why couldn't he do something. Why was she being so , so cool.

Well, .I guess I should go . . . let you get back to your . . .

He turned to go and then turned back. He smiled.

So, I guess I'll see you Monday. . . .
At Jimmy's. Eight o'clock.

Barbara and her producer exchanged glances. "Jimmy's?." Just like in the book?. Barbara made a mental note to make a reservation for dinner Monday night.

That would be a meeting she did not intend to miss.

Her producer smiled back at her. Barbara could read her thoughts. The cameraman winked at her.

It was all being recorded on tape.

* * *

She was still standing still. Frozen in place like an icicle.

She wanted to say something. Talk to him, be as casual as he was being.

Was he being casual? . . .

Was he trying to tell her he knew. . . .

Wear that dress, he said. To Jimmy's . . .

You look stunning in green he said

But what did he mean?.

He stopped and stared at her.

She stared back. What did he want?
Why didn't he do something. say something . . .

Then reality crashed in around her!

Oh, God, he didn't know who she was.

Her worse fears had just been realized.

She wanted to die.

He didn't know her . . .

He didn't know her at all!

Good-by then. He said.

And he thought

Why isn't she saying something—doing something. Giving me some reaction other than indifference.

She nodded good-by.

She was afraid to speak, afraid to even blink her eyes for fear the tears would flow.

How would she ever manage to finish the interview.

She felt a migraine beginning at the corner of her eye.

He turned to go.

Stop him!!

She screamed silently. Don't let him go!!!
Don't just let him walk out of my life so casually.

Her hand stretched out toward him, but she made no move. Spoke no words.

A spell held her still and silent. Maybe she was awake after all. In her dreams they never had this problem communicating.

Of course in her dreams they were in love with each other.

At the door he stopped and faced her again.

The restaurant scene from the book flashed across his mind. The way the two characters in her book were so detached, so afraid of revealing their true feelings.

Was this the same then?

They said the eyes were the mirrors of your soul.

He looked into her eyes. Into her soul
and he knew.

He knew!

He smiled at her.

He held the book up for her to see and started to speak.

Everyone wondered what would happen next,
Including her.

Everyone wondered what he would say . . .
Including her.

Her heart skipped a beat. Two. Three.

She stared at him. He was holding a book. *Her book?*

She was so nervous she couldn't tell.

Oh, God, what was he going to say? Was he going to expose her for the fool she was for thinking he might love her too. . . .

He said nothing. He shook his head slightly and turned once again to leave.

Hearts sank throughout the room. i*ncluding hers.*

She had never felt so low. She was never going to recover from this! Why hadn't she just kept her big mouth shut.

Her instincts were right.

She should have just given back the advance, never let them publish the book.

At least then she could have kept her dreams.

Now even they would be lost to her forever.

Forever.

The years stretched out in front of her emptier than she had ever imagined them.

Forever without him . . .
and then. . . .
and then. . . .

He turned back to her and said

I just had this one question
I was wondering if . . .
and

Ignoring Barbara. Ignoring the Film crew and the producer, ignoring everyone and everything except her . . .

He handed the book off to Deborah and in four steps he was there.

At last.

In front of her.

For the longest time, he just looked at her.

I was just wondering. He repeated . . . That is, I had this question . . . "

He held out his hand and smiled at her.

May I have this dance? he asked

Tears glistened in her eyes.

He took her hand in his, and she somehow found the courage to go with him.

The others stared after them as he led her across the floor to a melody only they could hear.

In his arms, the magic between them happened all over again. They glided across the floor as on that New Years Eve of long ago.

They fit together with perfection.

He didn't lead; she didn't follow.

They were one thought, one action.

The camera followed them

He looked into her eyes.
My own Cinderella, he said softly.
My very own Cinderella.
and .

He brushed his fingers through her hair and framed her face with his hands.

He kissed her.

He kissed her forehead. "My very," he repeated

He kissed her eyes. "own"

He kissed her mouth. "Cinderella".

He drank her in with his eyes.

And he kissed her again.

And she kissed him back!

She held on to him for fear he would vanish.
Or she would.

Or they would.

And she couldn't stop smiling.

He held her close to him.

He breathed in her scent.

Long remembered. Long loved.

He traced her face with his fingertips in wonder.

And he kissed her again.

And again.

And the cameras recorded it all.

Are you real? he asked softly?

Are we awake? Is this another dream?

A lone tear slid down her face.

He gathered it with his fingertips and touched it to his lips.

My own true love. Please tell me that the spell is broken at last and we are awake,"

I don't know. she told him. I don't know. . . .

Barbara took a half step forward and then back.

You are both awake. I promise you.

They kissed again and then she smiled and her voice was filled with wonder.

You know me? she asked. You really know who I am?.

My heart would know you anywhere, he told her.

You are so beautiful.
and once again he caressed her face.
and once again he kissed her.

Forgive me, He said.
I couldn't wait until Monday.

I couldn't wait another moment.

He kissed her again.

I opened the script and saw your name and I knew, Just as you wrote in your book, I knew.

And then I started reading and it was the story you told me on New Years Eve.

You remembered?
All this time . . .

He kissed her again.

I remember every word and every moment we spent together.

Another kiss.

I remember New Years Eve and I remember the fog and the cliffs and Paris. . . .

Most of all, I remember how much we loved each other everytime we were together.

He continued:

Four people sent me copies of your book. I received them all today.

How did you know? He asked. How did you know everything.

You told me, she said. I thought it was another dream, but I wrote it down. . . .

He nodded in understanding.

He remembered those dreams too.

He kissed her again. And again.

He looked deep into her eyes.

I love you. He said. I have always loved you.

He laughed.

I have waited so long to tell you how much I love you while we're here and in front of other people.

He raised his arms and looked up at the ceiling.

Do you hear me world! I love her!

He shouted.

They kissed again. He kissed her tears.

Why, he finally got to ask, Why did you leave me that New Years day? I nearly lost my mind.

I looked everywhere for you.

I never stopped looking for you. I never stopped loving you.

Not ever. Not for a moment.

He kissed her tenderly.

Everything you wrote about me in the book is true. What I thought. How I feel. . . .

Everything.

Why didn't you come to me? How could you have known all that and still doubted yourself and my love for you so much?

He kissed her again.

He couldn't stop looking at her.

He couldn't stop kissing her.

She didn't know what to say or how to say it.

She had thought so much and said so much and now she was mute.

They kissed again.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a wedding ring.

The camera zoomed in, thinking they were witnessing a proposal.

My wedding ring. Where did you. . . . ?

Was it because of this? Is this why you didn't stay? Because you're married?

I thought. . . . I thought I'd lost it. . . .

I found it that New Years morning. You were gone and then I found this ring and I thought. All I could think was that I had found the most incredible person in the world and that you were married to someone else . . .

I didn't know.

I was devastated. I knew you were the only woman I would ever love and you were gone and I thought you were married. And at first I didn't know what to do. . . .

Her hands kept touching him. His face, his arms, his chest.

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't know.
I never wanted to hurt you. Not ever.

I fell in love with you the first time you looked at me at the party and it was magic and .

I didn't know

She reached up and brushed her hands lightly across his cheekbones, trying to brush her tears from his face.

I thought I lost it. You've had it all this time?

It belonged to you. It was all I had."

He smiled

This ring. A white shirt, a fragment of a muddy blanket. The only pieces of you, you left behind.

They may not look like glass slippers to you but they are all very dear to me.

He kissed her again.

They were all I had left of a fairy tale.

He kissed her again. He couldn't kiss her often enough. Hold her close enough. See her enough.

He took the ring back.

You aren't married. He insisted.
You can't be married.
Tell me you aren't married.
and before she could respond

I don't care if you're married. You belong to me. We belong to each other. We have since that night.

For the first time she laughed.

It was a beautiful sound.

I'm not married. We were separated when . . .

She shook her head.

I'm not married.

He touched her face again.

He was afraid every moment that she would vanish as she had so many times before.

That was the real reason he hadn't ordered everyone to leave.

He would rather share this moment with the world than risk losing her again.

As for her, she was too stunned to think about dreams ending right now.

He was here.

He was kissing her and he remembered her and . . .

I didn't leave because I was married. she said I don't know why I left. I didn't want to go.I wanted to stay. To stay with you until. . . .

Until. He said. Until. That's the word engraved on this ring. I read the inscription on this ring . . .

He took the ring from her and held it up to read.

The cameraman managed to zoom in on the engraving.

Until
was inscribed on the inside of the plain gold band.

What kind of promise is that? he demanded. I. saw that and I thought what a fool the man who gave you this was. To make you such a weak pledge . . . And I knew then he couldn't possibly love you as much as I do . . .

He kissed her.

No one could ever love you as much as I do.

A pause while he kissed her again.and again.

I saw this 'Until' and I vowed I would find you somehow and we would be together. So, even though it was New Years day, I made a few calls and I guess I was pretty convincing about how much in love I was because I managed to get them to let me in at Tiffany's and. . . .

I bought you this."

He took a ring box out of his other pocket.

He opened it and she was looking at the most beautiful diamond and emerald ring she had ever seen.

A ring fit for Cinderella.

If you are going to make a promise. He said. Make a real promise. Or make none at all.

He held the new ring up and showed her the inscription.

Again the camera zoomed.

And again the world would be able to see what Barbara and the others could see now on the monitor.

Forever
it said.

Forever

It is the only kind of commitment I will give to you, he told her and It is the only kind of commitment I will accept from you."

Forever

She stared at the ring.

You . . . you bought this that New Years day?

That New Years day. he assured her.

I have the receipt if you want to see it.

He smiled at her and there was so much passion and love in his smile it made your teeth hurt.

I knew that night. I knew the first moment I saw you at the party that I never wanted to be apart from you. I made a commitment to you, to us that night.

Sometimes I got lost. And sometimes I doubted. And sometimes I turned away. You wrote all about that. But every night I prayed I would find you and when I did I wanted to have this ring with me . . .

But, Claudia . . . I thought. You and she; that is, everyone said.

He kissed her again and she melted in his arms.

Claudia is a dear friend. And, yes for a time. He smiled. But you know he said.

You wrote all about it. . . .

She nodded. She smiled . . .

And they kissed.

And then

He knelt down on one knee and took her hand in his.

He kissed her hand.

Will you marry me? He asked her.

Right there in front of God and Barbara Walters

Will you marry me?
Will you promise to love me back Forever?

I won't settle for anything less.

Tears were streaming down her face.

Would she marry him?

She looked over at Barbara.

Barbara was crying.

The producer was crying.

Deborah was crying.

The crew had tears in their eyes; on their faces.

And the camera took it all in.

She looked down at him.

She saw the love reflected in his eyes.

It was a miracle!

The fairy tale was real at last.

And the reality was better than the fairy tale.

She knelt in front of him and kissed him, holding his hands with her hands.

Yes. She said. Yes,
Yes, I will love you forever, and.
Yes, *I will marry you forever.*

Forever.

The years stretched out in front of her more magical than she had ever imagined them.

They kissed again and stood up together.

He placed the ring on her finger. He kissed the palm of her hand.

He kissed the ring. He kissed her.

The room broke out in spontaneous applause.

And for the first time since he had walked in the door, he acknowledged the crowded room.

Barbara saw and stepped forward to congratulate them both. She brushed away her tears.

True love does that to me. She explained. To all of us.

Barbara waited for him to tell them they couldn't stay, couldn't use the tape.

Instead, he graced the room with one of his famous smiles.

I guess I kind of interrupted things . . .

Everyone laughed.

Oh, I wouldn't worry about that. Barbara offered. At least not if you'll let us use this tape. and maybe sit down and talk about what just happened here.

His first reaction was to say no.

But if he said no and they left. would she leave too? As she had in the past?

Putting an engagement ring on her finger was no guarantee she would still be there in the morning. . . .

So they sat close to each other on one of the sofas and talked to Barbara.

Everyone noticed they couldn't stop touching each other. He caressed her hair.

She held his hand.

They held each other close.

Deborah scrounged up a box of Kleenex and a cold bottle of Crystal.

Tears were blotted and the

Champagne was poured and toasts were made.

After which,

Barbara received the interview of a lifetime and the highest ratings in her career. Along with several major awards.

After all, how do you top a story about a real
Prince Charming and Cinderella?

Barbara asked them about a wedding date.

They looked at each other and said together:

New Years Eve.

And invited everyone present to the wedding.

They talked. They laughed.

They were poster children for people in love.

Deborah found another bottle of champagne.

* * *

And then
finally,

As much as they wanted it to happen

And

As much as they were afraid of it happening.

It was time to bid Barbara and the others a fond adieu.

Barbara said they would probably run the entire segment uncut.

After all, she said, How do you improve on magic,

She offered them a copy of the tape and they eagerly accepted
and then . . .

Everyone left at once.

Deborah locked the doors behind them and then she said good-night too, and took the elevator to her apartment.
and

They were alone at last.

* * *

He took her in his arms and carried her to her bed and gently laid her down.

They made love.

They were love.

They felt as if they were spending this night inside a fairy tale.

* * *

Her skin was softer than imaginable, her laughter came from deep in her throat. . . .

They were made for each other and he thanked whatever Gods existed for bringing her back into his life.

They made love and spoke in soft voices all through the night.

* * *

And yes, in the early dawn morning she poured fresh orange juice and layered cream cheese on toasted onion bagels.

They walked in the surf for miles and then ran back to her place and the rumpled bed, laughing like children.

They tried to stay awake.

Even with all that had happened, they were afraid of falling asleep.

It was morning before they slept
but sleep they finally did.

* * *

When they awoke later that day they were still wrapped in each others arms.

And

They greeted the new day with laughter.

And with love.

* * *

They had broken all the rules.

And yet, in breaking them, they had kept the only one that truly mattered.

For the number one rule of all fairy tales is that you believe in the power of true love.

* * *

And so the fairy godmother waved her magic wand . . .

And they lived happily ever after.

* * *

90000
9 780738 828152

ISBN: 0-7388-2815-7

90000>

9 780738 828152

Xlibris Corporation
1-888-7-XLIBRIS
www.Xlibris.com
1944-ROBE